

THE VISION OF  
PIERS THE PLOWMAN

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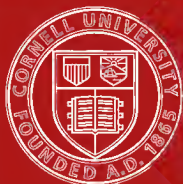
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# PIERS THE PLOWMAN



william Langland.

# THE VISION OF PIERS THE PLOWMAN

AN ENGLISH POEM OF THE FOURTEENTH  
CENTURY

TRANSLATED INTO MODERN PROSE  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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## PREFACE

THE translation of *Piers the Plowman* contained in this book was first published in 1895, and again, revised, in 1899. It then went out of print for some years, and the present new edition has been undertaken at the suggestion of Mr. J. W. Mackail, late Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

The text has been entirely revised and compared again, line for line, with the original Middle English. The annotations (for some of which the late Professor Skeat and his publishers kindly allowed the Editor to make use of the notes in the Oxford editions of the poem) have also been revised and additions made. An outline of the controversy now proceeding about the authorship of *Piers the Plowman* has been added to the Appendix. The Introduction, treating of the poem, is new.

It is scarcely needful to repeat that this modern version of a fourteenth-century work is not meant for the literary student who reads Middle English with ease. It is for the ordinary reader who is interested in the matter of the poem, but to whom the original form—unlike Chaucer's easier English—offers real difficulty. General readers of *Piers the Plowman* increase, for the book touches some of the

most keenly debated subjects of the present day in its vivid picture of certain phases of social life in England five hundred years ago. It is crowded with matter of great interest expressed imaginatively.

To present a poem in prose form is, in some sense, an impertinence to its author, and always calls for apology; something—it may be the best part—is lost of the original. But in the case of this poem the qualms of the translator are less, because the poet was not a great artist in metre. His subject-matter was first with him, and he would have approved, we may believe, of the present attempt to make the matter more widely known. His alliterative verse, more easily, perhaps, than any other metrical form, lends itself to prose rendering.

The translation of the poem has been made chiefly from the B-Text of the late Professor Skeat's editions, and has been kept as literal as possible. The prose form attempts to follow, on the whole, the English of the Authorized Version of the Bible.

Thanks are due to Professor W. P. Ker, of University College, London—an untiring helper of his old students—for much kindness and advice concerning the book; to Professor J. W. Mackail for other encouragement; and to Dr. R. W. Chambers, Librarian of University College, for information as to the authorship controversy.

KATE M. WARREN.

LONDON,  
*May, 1913.*

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	v
INTRODUCTION	i
ANALYSIS OF <i>PIERS THE PLOWMAN</i> , PROLOGUE, AND PASSUS I.-VII., WITH A FEW COMMENTS	- 16
PROLOGUE	23
PASSUS I.	34
PASSUS II.	43
PASSUS III.	53
PASSUS IV. -	69
PASSUS V. -	78
PASSUS VI. -	108
PASSUS VII. -	123
 APPENDICES:	
A—THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE LONGER PASSAGES ADDED TO <i>PIERS THE PLOWMAN</i> IN THE C-TEXT	135
B—SPECIMENS OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT FROM THE B-VERSION (ABOUT 1377)	156
C—OUTLINE OF THE CONTROVERSY -	161
D—A NOTE ON BOOKS -	167



# PIERS THE PLOWMAN

## INTRODUCTION

THE poem of the *Book of Piers the Plowman* (*Liber de Petro Plowman*), as comprised in the two standard editions of Professor Skeat,<sup>1</sup> is found in three principal forms or versions, named by modern scholars, for convenience, the A-Text, B-Text, and C-Text respectively. Of each of these three versions many manuscripts exist (forty-seven at least are known, of which thirteen are of the A-Text), though only four have as yet been printed in full. All three texts are written in alliterative verse, but they differ a good deal in length,<sup>2</sup> and somewhat in matter and style. The author's full name is nowhere definitely stated in the poem, but a personage appears there who is represented as the dreamer of the visions, who mentions occasionally the affairs of his own life, and, in more than one passage, is alluded to as "Will."

These are statements of simple fact, and until a

<sup>1</sup> London : Early English Text Society, 1867-1884. 4 vols.  
Oxford : 1886. 2 vols.

<sup>2</sup> In Professor Skeat's edition the A-Text has 12 Passus ; B, 20 ; and C, 23.

few years ago (1906) inferences as to authorship drawn from them were generally accepted. It was held from internal (and a very little external) evidence that the author was one William Langland, or Langley, who was born about 1332 at Cleobury Mortimer, in Shropshire. He was put to school, and became a scholar. When about thirty, in 1362, he wrote, perhaps at Malvern, the first draft of the *Vision* (known as the A-Text). About 1377 he expanded this into a second and longer poem (the B-Text), and at this time he may have been living at Cornhill, in London. A few years after 1390 (or perhaps 1398-9) he made the third and last revision of his work (the C-Text), when he had probably left London. He was by profession a clerk of the Church, in minor orders; but, for some reason, perhaps on account of his marriage, never rose to any high position in his calling. He appears to have been poor, earning only a fluctuating livelihood by such clerical duties as he might perform.

William Langland, the Dreamer, was accepted, then, as the author of *Piers the Plowman*.

Now, the position has changed. "William Langland is on trial for his life," and one of the most exciting literary warfares of modern scholarship has sprung up concerning the authorship of *Piers the Plowman*. It is a question of five authors of the poem or one. Professor Manly, of Chicago, believes that he can detect five writers at work, and he has supporters and followers who are defending this position. Since he threw down the challenge in

1906, however, the opposite party, who stand for unity of authorship, has grown in strength, and the issue of the fight is less certain than it seemed at first. At the present moment it has become clear to all concerned in the controversy that no final conclusion can be drawn as to authorship until the whole of the extant manuscripts of the poem have been thoroughly investigated. To get the full evidence necessary for forming a judgment, not only a comparison of the three main versions, A-, B- and C-Texts, is needful, but a collation of all the manuscripts (which differ considerably sometimes) of each version. That will be a long work, but it is proceeding.<sup>1</sup>

But whoever the author was, the book is a fact; it has been written, and may, so far, be treated regardless of the authorship controversy. As the poem stands in Professor Skeat's edition it falls naturally into two parts: (1) the Vision proper of Piers the Plowman, consisting of a Prologue and seven other portions (translated in the present volume); (2) the Visions of Do-wel, Do-bet, Do-best, more than twice as long as the other, and differing from it in the general character of the matter treated; the visions being less definite, with less story and more discussion. The second part of the *Liber de Petro Plowman* has been described by several writers, but has never yet been fully translated.<sup>2</sup> For literary

<sup>1</sup> It would be out of place to trace the controversy here, but for those who care to know the mere outline of it up to the present time (October, 1912) there is a Note appended (p. 161).

<sup>2</sup> See Note on Books (p. 168).

purposes the first part (Prologue and Passus I.-VII.) can be viewed as a whole. Its unity is fairly clear, and the B-Text, from which the present translation has been made, has not yet been assigned to more than one author.<sup>1</sup> The question of the authorship of the B-Text is only whether "Long Will" wrote it or another.

This part of *Piers the Plowman* may, at any rate, be taken as written in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, by a man whose temperament and character appear in his book.

The poem pictures the social, political, and religious life of the later fourteenth century, but the author does not write as a chronicler like Salimbene, or as an artist like Chaucer, but as an idealist and social reformer, whose reason for writing was not to describe the outward pageantry of life, but to give expression to his own discontent with things as they were, and to urge men to live life better. The need for self-expression and a passion for reforming the world are the motives of his writing. These determine his choice of matter and his method of work; and though he thought little of method, this may furnish the reason for his frequent and bewildering "shifting from the pictorial to the abstract," and perhaps for some of the apparently mechanical allegory that has often been complained of. All these devices may have been to him a living means

<sup>1</sup> The *full* B-Text, indeed, is not yet made; that which we possess in print has been made from a collation of only several (though the best) of the manuscripts of B.



of enforcing what he wished to enforce. Allegory, which seems to us dull, was much more alive to the people Langland wrote for. The number of morality plays in the next century shows that the writers believed there was a public who would, at least to some extent, welcome their allegorical incidents and personifications.

Everyone who has written about Langland has recognized his complete sincerity. It is a bare, passionate sincerity which gives life to every part of the poem. It is possible that he never consciously aimed at artistic effect, for he had not the instinct of the artist which was so strong in Chaucer, and he was comparatively little affected by the conventions of the age,<sup>1</sup> which Chaucer felt and followed closely in his earlier work. Langland, as far as we know, has left no work answering to that of Chaucer's early manhood in which can be traced the growth of the artist's power. Yet his singleness of mind and aim, and his sincerity of expression, do produce, especially in certain passages, the effect of art. To this also it may be due that even the plan of the poem, loose and disjointed as it appears at first, is found to have unity when looked at carefully.<sup>2</sup>

It is plain that, though he can write vivid narrative

<sup>1</sup> See for an interesting examination of the originality of the author of *Piers Plowman*, in his use of allegory, etc., *Piers Plowman: A Monograph* by Dorothy Owen, M.A. London, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> "With all his digressions and seemingly random thought, the argument is held together and moves harmoniously in its large places" (W. P. Ker in *Mediaeval Literature*).

and dramatic dialogue, and conduct a good logical argument and enjoy doing it, he does not aim at these things for their own sake, but uses them to illustrate and enhance his main theme, "Do well, learn to love and leave all other." He slips away from his story or description or argument into exhortation: "I counsel you, ye lords, leave such doings"; "I warn you, workmen, earn while ye may." He writes, indeed, with his eye on the object, but his object is not "objective." And his exhortations are not the mere conventional preachings of a rogue like the Pardoner, or of a worldly friar; he means them, and wants them to take effect. The poem is full of little sermons, direct and indirect—it is itself one long sermon—but this does not seem to have prevented its popularity; religious and moral discourse was generally regarded with respect in the fourteenth century and made its impression. The twentieth century wonders at Chaucer the artist telling the sermonic tale of Melibæus on the merry Pilgrimage, and at the Pilgrims for not objecting to it, but it is probable that Chaucer esteemed it; and the pilgrims liked it, and may have profited by it.

Langland addressed his poem to all classes of society, but he wished perhaps to teach "the people" especially, and it may be that this consideration led him to put it into the essentially English alliterative verse rather than into any of the more courtly metres derived from French or Italian. It is a form well suited to such matter as is treated in *Piers the Plowman*. Moreover, it is possible

that Langland knew his limitations as a versifier, and wisely made the best of them by his choice of this metre. The alliterative line, noble as it is when written by a skilful poet, does not of necessity fail to be effective when used by a writer of inferior art. He has written many good single lines and some fine passages, but it is plain, on the whole, that he was not a born metrist.

Yet whatever may be the flaws, the more the poem is read the more impressive the effect of it becomes. The author has poetic imagination along with descriptive power, dramatic dialogue, and living personification. And the absence of a definite artistic aim allows free play to his individuality; his angles are not rubbed down, his character and temperament stand out clear. We hear him all through the poem<sup>1</sup>; we learn to know almost the tone of his voice. And his personality is attractive, even lovable.

Seen, at first, wandering in the summer-time in the warm sunshine ("loafing" in a way that Wordsworth would have liked), lying lazily weary on the broad green bank and listening to the rippling of the water (we never find him, except once,<sup>2</sup> quite so happy again), he falls asleep in sheer drowsy enjoyment it might be supposed. But the dreaming that comes is not in harmony with the sunny peace of the summer morning, though one may imagine, if it be not too

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the whole poem, as well as to the part translated in this book.

<sup>2</sup> See *Vision of Do-wel*," B-Text, viii. 62-67.

fanciful, that the transition of thought and feeling (unexpressed, perhaps unconscious, and in spite of the literary convention of the May morning), may have been not quite apart from Wordsworth's when he sat in his grove listening to the "thousand blended notes" of early spring :

" To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran ;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man."<sup>1</sup>

But we get no more of that comfortable aspect of Nature in this part of the poem ; the dreams about man continue all day until the sun goes down. And the poet enjoys his dreaming, and wants more of it when it ends. From his dreams and his Hamlet-like way of musing over it all, we learn about himself. He talks all the time, thinking aloud, revealing the contrasts and inconsistencies of his nature. He blames himself for sloth, but his extensive reading was scarcely slothful.<sup>2</sup> He was too proud to "lout to lords," yet he is humble as he criticizes himself, and longs to be better. He is a man of moods, sometimes hopeful, sometimes depressed, but always, beneath all the moods, desiring the best things. He is occasionally bitter, but very often wise. He did not show at his best in ordinary intercourse ; he was

<sup>1</sup> Compare in the *Vision of Do-wel*, B-Text, xi., ll. 312, etc. All creatures seem to follow reason except man.

<sup>2</sup> The remarks that follow refer to the whole poem of *Piers the Plowman*, not only to the portion here translated.

"held a fool, until Reason had pity and sent him to sleep," when his dreams proved him no fool.

If inactivity of body was pleasant to him, his mind and his feelings were active enough. He is intense over everything; imploring to be taught the truth, passionately indignant against the wrong and stupidity that is spoiling life all round, and fervently pressing his remedy: "Learn to love and leave all other"; "Love is the physician of life"; "Love is the balm of heaven."

Something of the graciousness of these phrases belongs to his own spirit. We may see it in his pitifulness towards the weak and the suffering, such as overworked women in cottages, poor widows, helpless maidens, the deformed and feeble-minded, and true beggars who have fought with life and been defeated. His pity, too, for the blindness and ignorance of those who are "cumbered about with sin" is found in the gracious compassion of Repentance towards the penitents, and in the pathetic picture of the pilgrims wandering vainly after Truth. "There was no man so wise among them who knew the way thither, and they wandered over banks and hills, groping like beasts for a long time until it was late." And in the allegory, a little further on, by which Piers tells them the way to Truth, stress is laid (not in the manner of literary convention) upon Meekness, Love, and Mercy, "the maiden who hath power over them all, and is akin to the sinful." This touch of wistful gentleness is characteristic, and the more noticeable because it some-

times immediately follows a passage of stern realism.

He is no sentimentalist. He arraigns and judges every class with an impartiality equal to that of the medieval sculptors when they carved the procession of the souls of the damned at the Day of Judgment. No rank is exempt from a share in the general wrongdoing; the poor and the labourers as well as the rich and the leisured; even the ploughmen are not let off. And the cure for them all is the same: Learn to love. Every kind of social wrong is seen as an offence against the Law of Love, though the sinners may not recognize it as such. For these, therefore, the urging of the moral law in specific cases is the best teaching. Avarice is not told to love, but to make retribution to those whom he has cheated. In so doing he was beginning to fulfil the law—learning to love, in a low sort of way, by merely doing justice. To do one's ordinary duty towards God and man was the beginning of the fulfilment of the Law of Love. "Do-wel" is Langland's name for this state.

The poet, it will be seen, was not a common revolutionary preaching an impulsive revolt, but a reformer who based his advice upon a knowledge of human nature.

His attitude towards the Church was one of love and loyalty (while condemning abuses within her, a position which some people find it hard to understand),<sup>1</sup> and was, to him, the only possible attitude if

<sup>1</sup> Partially informed writers on the Church in the Middle Ages frequently fail to "see her steadily and see her whole."

effective reform was to be carried out. Social amelioration without religion would have been unthinkable to him. He sided with no special movement or party; Wyclif's revolt against certain dogmas of the Church and John Bull's socialistic revolt were equally alien to this reformer, though, by an irony, his writings were afterwards used in support of these things. Whatever of the democratic may be found in his poems comes from his religion, which viewed all souls as in essence equal before God.

His impartial attitude, his refusal to fawn on the great, and his musing temperament, were not likely to bring worldly prosperity to a man in a lower rank of life, and it is not surprising that at the end of our volume we find him "meatless and moneyless on Malvern Hills" (lines unaltered in all three versions).

The picture of the fourteenth century given in the poem, though vivid, impartial, and, in a sense, comprehensive, is yet limited. It is society as seen by a man who had been kept low in the world by the accidents of birth and fortune, though by education he was fitted for a different social condition. Moreover, he was a born idealist who wanted things to be perfect. He does not exaggerate the abuses of the time, but he emphasizes them. His picture, while true, is not the whole truth; the elements of it are

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She knew her own shortcomings as well as any modern historian knows them, and "the actual letters of Popes and Bishops" show how she strove for reform. Even in the fourteenth century, when most open to criticism, she was the strongest friend of the poor, of their welfare, of their education.

not in just proportion. He only indicates occasionally and slightly that which was always to be seen modifying the darkness; the elemental good things of life, the simple affections of human relationship, "laughter and the love of friends"; the sweet and beautiful English country (unspoiled by railroad or motor-car); and true piety. Without these, in larger proportion than he shows them, life could not have gone on, for long, at all. They are seen only in the background of his picture, while the middle and foreground are dark. His point of view is, in so far, the opposite of Chaucer's, whose main effect is brightness with a hint of clouds in the distance—a mere indication of the social evil, which for Langland seemed, at times, to blot out everything else. His contribution to history, then, needs to be taken with reserve, and Chaucer's *Tales* are part of the necessary complement.

Patient and minute historical research is slowly making clear the character of the much-abused and much-misunderstood "Middle Ages"—"intellectually so preposterous, spiritually so strange"—and it is coming to be realized that pictures like Langland's can no longer be accepted as sufficient.

It is usual to speak of the unrest and disintegration of the later Middle Ages as preparing the way for a finer state of civilization, and to some extent there is truth in this view; but comparing life and its conditions in the twentieth century with the same in the fourteenth, it might occur to a disinterested person to ask whether it has yet been proved that the



whole gain of the change has up till now outweighed the loss. Was there anything worse in trade than the "sweated industries" of our own time? Or have we any means equal to that of the guilds for uniting in fellowship masters and men, and for securing the greatest liberty of the individual compatible with the highest good of the State? The Time Spirit was one of revolt in the fourteenth century, but the Time Spirit of an age is not of necessity always right, though on the surface, and for a while, it may seem so. It is apt to be local and short-sighted, and may or may not be in immediate harmony with the purpose of the ages. The unchanging needs of the human soul, indicated by its deep desire for certain common everlasting things—faith, hope, Divine and human love, and freedom in which to hold or practise these (not necessarily made more accessible by revolt)—are as likely to point to the line of true progress as the most exciting revolutions, which sometimes are, and sometimes are not, an expression of those needs :

"— the heart of man is set to be  
The centre of this world, about the which  
Those revolutions of disturbances still roll."

But, however that may be as regards the fourteenth century, there is certainly no period that can be studied from so many different standpoints as the three centuries that ended in 1400. It was a time of startling contrasts; of faith and of scepticism; of extraordinary saintliness and of strange wicked-

ness ; of wide and deep learning and of ignorance ; of mystic spiritual beauty and of Satanic ugliness ; of reverence and of ribaldry. And this perplexes the student. Yet one fact is indisputable : that in times of imaginative and spiritual dryness, artists, poets, and lovers of romance, as well as people of all kinds who love true piety, have looked back to these centuries and have drawn from them fresh inspiration. They have stimulated great movements in religion, in art and in literature, and their virtue is not yet exhausted.

“ Hither as to their fountain other stars  
Repair, and in their urns draw golden light.”

The author of *Piers the Plowman*, in the midst of what has been quaintly called the “spotted actuality” of his day, sees little of this ideal aspect, though it may sometimes be caught sight of between his lines. But it is significant that the poem, while it treats of so much that is bad in the life of society, is not depressing in its general effect ; and the reason is that behind the darkness of the picture there is an ideal, and a belief that it may be realized, both in the author’s mind and in the mind of the society he surveyed. However bad things might be, the individual and society had before them, mentally and often visibly, an ideal of life founded on a faith universally accepted. “ Whatever may be one’s belief, a realization of the power and import of the Christian faith is needed for an understanding of the thoughts and feelings

moving the men and women of the Middle Ages, and for a just appreciation of their aspirations and ideals."

A common religion was the foundation of everyday life, and was accepted, nominally, perhaps by a few, but really, by the many, as a primal necessity. And a visible Church embodied this religion. Though her robe might be spotted through the sins of her children, she was the mother of the nation.

Those who saw "in a dry light" the abuses of the visible institution, recognized that there was an invisible and ideal Holy Church, which, however unworthily represented on earth, justly claimed obedience and honour from all her sons and daughters.

Langland's plea for social reform is rooted, then, in his religious belief. And it is this faith which gives him the power, when almost in despair at the baffling stupidities and blatant wrongdoing of his day, to set out once again, though in tears and mourning, after many failures, to look for Piers the Plowman: the Ideal Person, the Christ, the only true reformer of the world. That the Divine Plowman existed and might be found he never doubted. *O Oriens, splendor lucis æternæ, et Sol justitiæ: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis.*

ANALYSIS OF  
"PIERS THE PLOWMAN," PROLOGUE,  
AND PASSUS I.-VII., WITH A  
FEW COMMENTS

ANALYSIS OF THE "VISION"

THE poem is divided into eight parts—a Prologue and seven other divisions, each of which is called a *passus* (or *portion*).

In the Prologue the author falls asleep on Malvern Hills and dreams of an unknown wilderness, with a tower on the east of it, and a deep valley on the west, occupied by a dungeon. Between the two boundaries is a field full of people of many kinds, working or amusing themselves; but the Church element, in one form or another, predominates. These are all described, and none of them has a really good word from the poet, except the ploughman and the honest hermits. The narrative then slips off from the direct story of the dream into a further description of the doings of the Church dignitaries, and this leads to a digression upon the power of the keys deputed by St. Peter to the Church of Rome.

Then we are swiftly and abruptly transported back to the field, into a group of which the King is the centre, and he is addressed by a lunatic, an angel, a "glutton of words," and the Commons. Then, all in a moment—and this is after Langland's manner—the whole of this piece of action disappears, and its place is taken by a crowd of rats and mice, who come forth, helter-skelter, to a "council," and act out the fable of the attempt to bell the cat. This over, again the scene shifts to another quarter of the field, once more we see the crowd moving hither and thither; and with the cries of the cooks and taverners of the street touting for custom, this portion of the dream closes.

*Passus I.* continues the vision. A lovely lady appears, and begins to tell the dreamer the meaning of these things. The Tower is Truth, she says, and then she turns to speak of righteous living, but Langland interrupts her by asking to whom all the money of the world belongs. She answers him from the words of the Gospel, and goes on to explain what the dungeon in the valley means. The dreamer asks who this wise woman can be. She says that she is Holy Church; at which he begs her to instruct him, and an exhortation which follows is full of common-sense morality in vigorous phrasing.

In *Passus II.* Holy Church is about to leave the sleeper, but he begs her to stay and tell him more, and especially to teach him to know "the False." She points out to him Falsehood and his fellows, and then follows the vivid description of Lady Meed

—the most subtly conceived personage in the whole poem, a mingling of the legitimate attractiveness of just reward and of the false allurements of bribery—and the account of Meed's approaching marriage to Falsehood. Holy Church now leaves the dreamer, who sleeps on and sees the preparation for the wedding of the two deceivers. But Theology suddenly interferes, reminding them all of Meed's rightful office; she ought to marry Truth. He advises them to go to the King's Court at Westminster, to get the matter settled. They prepare for the journey and set off; but when they arrive, being warned that the King means to bring their ill-doing to justice, they disperse in dire haste, except Meed, who is brought to the King. In connection with Meed's trial, it may be remembered that, according to the feudal custom, no heiress in wardship could marry without the consent of her guardian, and Meed is the ward of the King.

*Passus III.* shows us Meed at Westminster, lodged luxuriously until the time of her trial. She is so charming that everyone wishes to be friendly. Judges and clerks visit her, and she gives them costly gifts. A friar hears her confess, and absolves her of her shameless sins, on condition that she pay the cost of a new window for their church, in which her name shall be engraven. This transaction calls forth a protest from the writer against such ostentatious almsgiving.

We are then carried on to the trial of Meed, which extends to the end of *Passus IV.*, and is conceived

throughout with vivid directness. The King would forgive the lady if she married Conscience. She is willing; but Conscience scornfully refuses, and brings against her a long and vehement indictment. Meed asks humbly for leave to speak, and pleads for herself with such eloquent cunning that the King exclaims, "Meed, methinketh, is well worthy of the mastery!"

Conscience, however, answers her, and shows the difference between the two characters involved in Meed—apparently denying to the lady before him any of the good qualities of pure Reward; and he prophesies a golden age of Love and Justice. Meed, full of anger, attempts to open up a fresh dispute with Conscience, but the King silencing them both, tries to reconcile them. Conscience refuses to look at Meed unless Reason bid him. Then Reason is sent for, and comes to Court. The King pays him great honour, and they take counsel together. At this point there comes in—after that abrupt fashion of Langland, without any preliminaries—a plaintiff, named Peace, who presents a petition asking for redress against Wrong, who has used him ill. Meed tries to bribe Peace into silence, and Peace begs the King to stop the trial; this is refused, Reason supporting the refusal. Finally Meed is pronounced guilty and severely reprovved by the King, who threatens that in future Reason shall judge every case in Court. Meed leaves the hall in disgrace, attended, however, by a sizer and summoner, and we see her no more. Reason agrees to

stay with the King for ever. This is the end of the first dream in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*.

— We are now conducted to an altogether different scene, though the background of the action is still the Field of Folk. In *Passus V.* the dreamer awakes, but sleeps again, and sees Reason preaching in the Field before the King. Then there follows what M. Jusserand has finely called the “general confession of England in the time of the Plantagenets.” Moved to penitence by the preaching of Reason and Repentance, the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Lechery, Envy, Wrath, Avarice, Gluttony, Sloth—make their confession, and it is a ruthless revelation of the seamy side of human nature in the fourteenth century. The subject is treated with the utmost realism and with touches of dark humour.

The confession over, Repentance prays for all the penitents, Hope collects them together with a blast from her horn, and they all set out on the famous search for the shrine of Truth. This is one of the best-known passages of the poem, and finely executed. There is pathos in the few lines which picture the blind groping of the pilgrims in their vain effort to find the right road; and satire in the situation of the Palmer who cannot help them, though he has visited all the great shrines. In the midst of their perplexity, with the weird suddenness already spoken of, Piers the Plowman comes forth, says that he knows Truth well, and will show them the way. His description of the road (which involves an allegory) brings us to the end of the *Passus*,



which concludes, in a dramatic fashion, with the sudden disappearance of a Pardoner to fetch his bull and brevets, as credentials on the journey, followed by a woman of ill fame, who would pass for his sister.

— *Passus VI.* opens with the complaint of the pilgrims at the difficulty of the way before them; Piers offers to go with them as soon as he has ploughed and sown his half-acre. The pilgrims in return offer to help him, and Piers, after making his will, sets them all to work. At noon, going to inspect them, he discovers lazy vagabonds taking their ease in idleness; and this gives the author occasion for a piece of satirical and realistic writing of the same vigorous and ruthless type as that which describes the confession of the Deadly Sins. After vain efforts to make the loafers labour, Piers calls out for Hunger, who cows them with hard usage, while in fear and trembling they hurry to work. Piers gets some useful advice from him, and would then bid him farewell. But Hunger refuses to go, he must first dine; the people, in dismay, have to feed him with their scanty stock of provisions. Soon after a time of plenty comes to the land, and the *Passus* closes with a warning to the labourer against reckless indulgence of appetite in the year of abundance, for Famine is always near at hand.

— With *Passus VII.* we seem to lose sight of the pilgrims, though we are dimly conscious of them in the background. Truth is represented as sending to Piers a bull of pardon for nearly every

class of sinner. Merchants and men of law, however, are only partially pardoned; false beggars have no pardon. The allusion to beggars leads the author to dilate upon the life and doings of the numerous "bidders and beggars" of the time; by which we realize that in the fourteenth century they formed a "class."

Then a priest asks to see the bull of pardon sent to Piers, and finding in it only two simple lines—*those who do well, shall have well; those who do evil, shall have evil*—scoffs at it, when Piers in vexation tears the bull across, and disputes with the priest upon it. Their contention awakes the sleeper, who debates with himself over the value and meaning of his dream. The *Vision* concludes with a fervent declaration concerning the efficacy of a good life at the Day of Doom.

## PROLOGUE

*The author falls asleep and dreams—His vision of the Field between the Tower and the Dungeon—In the Field are gathered all classes of people, and a king to whom an angel speaks—The rout of rats and mice.*

IN a summer season when the sun was warm, I clad me in clothing as a shepherd, in the habit of a hermit of unholy works, and I went far and wide through the world to hear the wonders.

But on a May morning on the Malvern Hills, a marvellous thing befell me; methought it was of faery.<sup>1</sup> I was outwearied with wandering, and went to rest down by a broad bank beside a burn, and as I lay there leaning, and looked in the water, it sounded so merrily that I slipped into a slumber.

Then I dreamed a marvellous dream: that I was in a wilderness, I wist not where, and as I looked on high, into the East toward the sun, I saw a tower upon a hill<sup>2</sup> wonderfully wrought. There was a deep dale below,<sup>3</sup> and therein a dungeon with deep

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, the result of enchantment.

<sup>2</sup> *Toft* in the original.

<sup>3</sup> The *dale* is said to be "westwarde" in the C-Text.

and dark ditches, and dreadful to look at. A fair field full of folk I found betwixt the dale and hill, with all manner of men, the mean and the rich, working and wandering as the world requireth. Some put themselves to the plough and full seldom played. They laboured full hard in planting and in sowing, and won what wasters destroy with their gluttony. And some held to pride, and thereafter apparelled themselves and came quaintly bedecked with show of clothing.

Many put themselves to prayers and penance; and all for our Lord's love, hoping to win the bliss of heaven, they lived full straitly, as anchorites and hermits, who stay in their cells and covet not to walk the country, nor for dainty living please their flesh. And some choose trade, they prosper the better; it seemeth to our sight that such men thrive. And some as minstrels can make mirth and get gold with their glee; they are guiltless, I allow. But jesters and janglers, the children of Judas, invent for themselves fancies,<sup>1</sup> and make them fools, and yet have wit at will to work, if they had to. I will not here prove what Paul preacheth of them, for *Qui turpiloquium loquitur*<sup>2</sup> is Lucifer's servant.

Bidders<sup>3</sup> and beggars went busily about, with their bellies and their bags crammed full of bread; they told lying tales for their food and fought in the ale-

<sup>1</sup> C-Text has "foul fancies."

<sup>2</sup> Whoso speaketh shameful speech.

<sup>3</sup> *Bidders*, a synonym for *beggars*.

house. Those Robert knaves,<sup>1</sup> God wot, in gluttony they go to bed, and rise up with ribaldry, and sleep and sorry sloth ever pursue them. Pilgrims and palmers pledged themselves to seek St. James<sup>2</sup> and the saints in Rome. They went on their way with many wise<sup>3</sup> tales, and had leave to lie all their life afterwards. I saw some who said they had sought saints, and in every tale they told it seemed from their speech that their tongue was more tuned to lying than to telling truth. A crowd of hermits with hooked staves went to Walsingham, and their wenches after them; great and long loobies, that were loath to labour, clothed themselves in copes to be known from others, and made them hermits to have their ease.

There I found friars of all the four Orders,<sup>4</sup> who preached to the people for their own profit, and interpreted the Gospel as it seemed good to them; through the greed of their Order<sup>5</sup> they explained it as they would. Many of these master friars may clothe them at their liking, for their money and merchandise go together. For since Charity hath been chapman, and chief in shriving lords,<sup>6</sup> many wonderful things have happened in a few years.

<sup>1</sup> Lawless vagabonds. The hooligans of the fourteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> His shrine was at Compostella, in Galicia.

<sup>3</sup> C-Text, "unwise."

<sup>4</sup> *I.e.*, the Carmelites, Augustines, Dominicans, and Franciscans.

<sup>5</sup> *Lit.* "For covetousness of copes."

<sup>6</sup> Compare the *Friar* in Chaucer's Prologue.

Except Holy Church and they hold together better, the greatest mischief on earth will mount up full fast.<sup>1</sup>

A Pardoner<sup>2</sup> was preaching there as if he were a priest; he brought forth a bull with the bishop's seals, and said that he himself could absolve them all of falseness in fasting and of broken vows. Laymen believed him well, and liked his words, and they came up kneeling to kiss his bulls. He thrust his brevet in their faces and bleared their eyes, and gained rings and brooches by his charter. Thus they give their gold to keep gluttons, and put their faith in such worthless fellows, who follow lechery. If the bishop were holy and worth both his ears, his seal would never be sent to deceive the people so. But it is not about the bishop that the knave preacheth,<sup>3</sup> for the parish priest and he divide the silver which the poor folk of the parish ought to have, but for them.

Parsons and parish priests complained to the bishop that their parishes had been poor since the time of the pestilence,<sup>4</sup> that they might get licence

<sup>1</sup> The regular friars and secular clergy quarrelled over the right of hearing confessions.

<sup>2</sup> A seller of Papal indulgences.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Skeat considers this passage to be "slightly humorous," meaning, "but you may be sure that it is never against (or with reference to the bishop) that he preaches." For the Pardoner had obtained leave to preach and give indulgences from the bishop himself.

<sup>4</sup> *I.e.*, between 1348 and 1376 there were several great pestilences. Probably the first, that of 1348, is here meant.

and leave to dwell in London and sing for simony the service there; for silver is sweet.

Bishops and bachelors,<sup>1</sup> both masters and doctors, who hold their cures under Christ, and have the tonsure in token and sign that they should shrive their parishioners and preach and pray for them and feed the poor, live in London in Lent and at other times. Some serve the King and count out his silver; they claim his debts in Exchequer and Chancery from the Wards<sup>2</sup> and Wardmotes,<sup>3</sup> and also claim waifs and strays.<sup>4</sup> And some as servants serve lords and ladies, and sit giving judgment<sup>5</sup> in the seat of stewards; their Mass and Matins and many of their Hours<sup>6</sup> are done undevoutly. Fear is lest Christ at the last will curse full many of them in His Court.<sup>7</sup>

As to the power to bind and to unbind, that Peter had in charge, as the Book telleth, I perceived how he left it with love, as our Lord bade, amongst four virtues,<sup>8</sup> the best of all the virtues, which are called

<sup>1</sup> Here a clerical student preparing for a higher degree.

<sup>2</sup> Divisions of the city.

<sup>3</sup> The courts or meetings held in the *Wards*.

<sup>4</sup> *Stray*. Property left by an alien at his death, which passed to the King in default of heirs. The word here may also be confused with *stray* in the sense of any goods without an owner, or strayed cattle.

<sup>5</sup> They took secular occupation for sake of gain.

<sup>6</sup> Canonical hours, prayers made at stated times in the day.

<sup>7</sup> *Lit.*, "in the Consistory"—*i.e.*, the Church council, or assembly of prelates; here used of the Day of Judgment.

<sup>8</sup> *I.e.*, St. Peter deputed the power of the keys to the four cardinal virtues—Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice.

Cardinals, and Closing Gates,<sup>1</sup> where Christ reigneth in His Kingdom, to close and to shut and to open it unto them, and to show Heaven's bliss. But as to the Cardinals at the Court<sup>2</sup> who received that name, and presumed they had power in themselves to make a pope;—that they have that power that Peter had I will not call in question, for the election belongeth to love and to learning; therefore I can, and cannot, speak more of that Court.<sup>3</sup>

Then there came a King, led by Knighthood; the power of the Commons made him reign. And then came Mother-wit and made clerks<sup>4</sup> to counsel the King and to care for the commonweal.

The King and Knighthood and Clergy planned that the Commons should provide for themselves.<sup>5</sup> The Commons then devised handicrafts which Mother-wit could undertake, and ordained ploughmen for the profit of all the people, to till and to labour, as honest life requireth.

The King and the Commons and Mother-wit, the third, made Law and Loyalty, for each man to know his own. Then a lunatic looked up, a lean thing<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is a sort of translation of the Latin *cardinalis*, derived from *cardo*, a hinge. The power of the keys is, as it were, made for a moment into a power of the hinges. (*Skeat.*)

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, at the Court of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, I could say much more, but reverence restrains me.

<sup>4</sup> Students and men of learning.

<sup>5</sup> *Themselves* appears to stand here for *all of them*; the C-Text reads "*provide their provisions.*"

<sup>6</sup> The word *thing* = *creature* or *person*; there is no contempt intended.



withal, and kneeling to the King said, scholar-wise: "Christ keep thee, Sir King, and also thy kingdom, and grant thee so to govern thy land that Loyalty may love thee, and thou for thy righteous rule be rewarded in Heaven."

And then in the air on high, an angel of Heaven stooped to speak in Latin—for laymen could not discuss nor judge what should justify them, but suffer and serve, therefore the angel said:—

"Sum Rex, sum Princeps · neutrum fortasse deinceps ;—  
 O qui iura regis · Christi specialia regis,  
 Hoc quod agas melius · iustus es, esto pius !  
 Nudum ius a te · vestiri vult pietate ;  
 Qualia vis metere · talia grana sere.  
 Si ius nudatur · nudo de iure metatur ;  
 Si seritur pietas · de pietate metas !" <sup>1</sup>

Then a glutton of words, a Goliardus,<sup>2</sup> was angry and answered afterwards to the angel on high:—

<sup>1</sup> (You say) "I am a king, I am a prince," (but you will be)  
 "neither perhaps hereafter.

O thou who dost administer the special laws of Christ the King,

That thou mayst do this the better, as thou art just, be merciful !

Naked justice requires to be clothed by thee with mercy,

Whatever crops thou wouldst reap, such be sure to sow.

If justice is stripped bare, let bare justice be reaped by thee ;

If mercy is sown, mayst thou reap of mercy !"

(Adapted from Skeat's translation.)

<sup>2</sup> A word which went through many changes of meaning. It comes originally from the word *Golias*, a name perhaps invented by Walter Map (a satirist of the thirteenth century),

"Dum rex a regere · dicatur nomen habere,  
Nomen habet sine re · nisi studet iura tenere." <sup>1</sup>

And then all the Commons cried in Latin verse, for the King's counsel—if any would interpret—  
"*Precepta Regis sunt nobis vincula legis.*" <sup>2</sup>

With that there ran all at once a rout of rats<sup>3</sup> and small mice, more than a thousand, with them, and came to a council for their common profit. For a Cat of a Court came when he liked and caught them easily, and seized them at will, and played with them perilously, and pushed them about. "For fear of divers dangers we dare not look about us; and if we grumble at his game he will vex us all, scratch us, or claw us, or hold us in his clutches, so that we loathe our life before he letteth go of us. If we could by any wit withstand his will, we might lord it up above, and live at our ease."

A rat of renown, very ready of tongue, said that to his mind this was the sovereign remedy: "I have seen men," he said, "in the city of London, bearing

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and applied to an imaginary bishop. It grew to mean "an educated jester or buffoon, an author of loose or satirical Latin verses" (N. E. D.)

<sup>1</sup> While a ruler is said to have his name (from ruling),  
He has the name without the thing unless he study to keep  
the laws.

<sup>2</sup> The precepts of the King are for us the bonds of law.

<sup>3</sup> In this version of the ancient fable the rats are the citizens and influential commoners; the mice are the less important folk; the cat is Edward III., or, as some say, John of Gaunt, and the kitten is his grandson Richard, then heir to the throne, and afterwards Richard II.

bright rings about their necks, and some with collars of cunning workmanship ; they run loose both in warren and waste wherever they please, and at other times they are elsewhere, as I hear tell. Were there a bell on their collar, by Jesu, methinketh men might know where they were going and run away. And right so," quoth that rat, "reason telleth me to buy a bell of brass or of bright silver, and fasten it on to a collar for our common profit, and hang it upon the Cat's neck : then we can hear whether he moveth or resteth or runneth to play ; and if he like to play then we may look for it, and appear in his presence the while play liketh him ; and if he grow wrathful, beware and shun his path."

All the rout of rats assented to this plan, but when the bell was bought and hanged on the collar there was no rat in all the rout who durst, for all the realm of France, have bound the bell about the Cat's neck, nor have hung it about the Cat's throat to win all England. And they held themselves not bold enough and their counsel weak, and they accounted their labour lost and all their long devising.

A mouse, who had good parts, methought, struck forth sternly to the front and stood before them all, and to the rout of the rats spake these words : "Though we killed the Cat yet would there come another to scratch us and all our kind, though we should creep under benches. Therefore I counsel all the Commons to let the Cat alone, and may we never be so bold as to show him the bell. For I heard my sire say, seven years ago, that where the

Cat is a Kitten the Court is full wretched. Holy Writ witnesseth to that, if one will read it: *Ve terre ubi puer rex est*, etc.<sup>1</sup> For no man may have rest there by night for the rats; the while he<sup>2</sup> catcheth conies our carrion he coveteth not, but feedeth himself all with venison—may we never defame him! For better is a little loss than a long sorrow—confusion amongst us all, if the Cat died, though we might lose a tyrant. For we mice would destroy many men's malt, and also ye rout of rats would rend men's clothes were there not that Cat of the Court who can catch you; and had ye rats your will ye could not rule yourselves. As for me," quoth the mouse, "I see so much that would come afterwards that never shall the Cat nor the Kitten be vexed by my counsel; no more talk shall be of this collar, that has never cost me anything. And though it had cost my goods I would not confess it, but suffer them as they would to do as it liketh them, fettered and unfettered, to catch what they may. Therefore every wise man I warn: let him look well to his own."

What this dream meaneth, ye merry men, divine ye; for, by dear God in Heaven, I dare not.

Also in that field there moved about a hundred in silken coifs, they seemed like serjeants at the Bar. They pleaded the law for pence and pounds, and not once would unloose their lips for love of our Lord. Thou mightest better measure the mist on

<sup>1</sup> Woe to thee, O land, whose king is a boy.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, the Cat.

Malvern Hills than get a mumble from their mouth, except money were shown them.

Barons and burgesses and bondmen also I saw in this assembly, as ye shall afterwards hear. Bakers and brewers and many butchers, wool-weavers and weavers of linen, tailors and tinkers and collectors of dues in the markets, masons and miners, and many other crafts. There moved about every kind of labourer living, such as ditchers and delvers who do their work ill and spend the long day in "*Dieu vous save Dame Emma*."<sup>1</sup>

"Cooks and their knaves cried, 'Hot pies, hot! Good pigs and geese! Come and dine, come and dine!' Taverners, in turn with them, shouted the song, 'White wine of Alsace, and red wine of Gascony, wine of the Rhine and wine of Rochelle, to wash down the roast!'"

All this I saw asleep, and seven times more.

<sup>1</sup> "God save you, Lady Emma," the refrain of a popular song.

## PASSUS I.

*A lovely lady tells him the meaning of the Tower and Dungeon—She is Holy Church, and instructs him concerning Truth, Pride, and Love.*

WHAT this mountain meaneth, and the dark dale and the field full of folk, I will show you plainly.

A lady lovely of countenance, clothed in linen, came down from a castle and called me graciously and said, "Son,<sup>1</sup> sleepest thou? Seest thou the people, how busy they be in the crowd? Most of the people who live on earth, if they have honour in the world wish for no better; of other heaven than here they hold no account."

Though she was fair I was afraid of her face, and said, "Pardon, madam, what meaneth this?"

"In the tower on the hill," she said, "is Truth; and He would that ye should do as His word teacheth you, for He is the Father of Faith who made you all, both fell<sup>2</sup> and face, and gave you five wits to honour Him therewith, while ye are here. And therefore He bade the earth provide each of you, at

<sup>1</sup> The C-Text has "Will."

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, skin. The original word here kept is used in this sense by Shakespeare.

your need, with wool, with linen, with food, in such measure as to give you ease. And of his courtesy commanded three things in common ; none but those are needful, and I will name them and reckon them up rightly, and afterwards do thou repeat them : The one is clothing to keep thee from the cold ; and meat for meals to keep off discomfort ; and drink when thou art dry. But do nothing out of measure, so thou be the worse when thou shouldst work. Therefore dread delicious drink and thou shalt do the better ; moderation is a medicine, though thou mayst yearn for much. What the body asketh is not all good for the spirit, nor is all life to thy body that is dear to thy soul. Believe not thy body, for a liar teacheth it, to wit, the wretched world which would betray thee. For the devil and the flesh together follow thee, this and that pursue thy soul and whisper in thine heart ; and for thou shouldst be wary I teach thee the best."

"Pardon, madam," I said, "your words like me well, but the money of the earth that men hold so fast, tell me, madam, to whom that treasure belongeth ?"

"Go to the gospel," said she, "that God Himself spake when the people questioned Him in the Temple about a penny, whether they should therewith honour Cæsar the king. And God asked of them, Of whom spake the superscription and likewise the image that stood thereon ? '*Cesaris*,' they said, 'we all see him well.' '*Reddite Cesari*,'<sup>1</sup> said God, 'what *Cesari*

<sup>1</sup> Render to Cæsar.

belongeth, *et que sunt Dei, Deo*,<sup>1</sup> or else ye do ill.' For rightful Reason should rule you all, and Mother-wit be warden to keep your wealth, and be guardian of your treasure and deliver it you at need, for those two and Thriftiness hold together."

Then I asked her plainly, by Him who made her, "I beseech you, madam, what may mean that dungeon in the dale, that is dreadful to see?"

"That is the Castle of Care, and whoso cometh therein may curse that he was born either body or soul. A man dwelleth therein who is called Wrong, the Father of Falsehood, and he built it himself. Adam and Eve he egged on to do ill, he counselled Cain to kill his brother, Judas he beguiled with the Jews' silver, and then hanged him afterwards on an elder tree. He is the hinderer of Love and lieth to everyone, those who trust in his treasure betrayeth he soonest."

Then I wondered in my mind what woman it might be who taught such wise words from Holy Writ, and in the High Name I asked her, ere she went away, who verily she was that counselled me so graciously.

"I am Holy Church," she said, "thou oughtest to know me; I received thee the first and taught thee the faith, and thou didst bring me sureties that thou wouldst fulfil my bidding and love me faithfully while thy life endureth."

Then I fell on my knees and besought mercy of her, and prayed her piteously to pray for my sins,

<sup>1</sup> And [the things] which are of God to God.



and also to teach me kindly to believe on Christ, so that I might do His will who made me man. "Point me out no treasure, but tell me this one thing—how I may save my soul, O thou who art accounted holy!"

"When all treasures are tried," quoth she, "Truth is the best. I put it on *Deus caritas*<sup>1</sup> to pronounce the truth. It is as dearly loved treasure as dear God Himself. Whosoever is true of tongue and telleth truth alone, and doth works thereto and wisheth no man ill, on earth and above he is a god, according to the gospel, and like our Lord, by St. Luke's words. The clerks that know this should teach it about, for Christian and unchristian claim the truth alike. Kings and knights should observe it rightly, and ride through the kingdoms, and take *transgressores* and bind them fast, till Truth had determined their trespass. And that is plainly the profession that pertaineth to knights, and not to fast one Friday in five score winters, but to hold with him and with her that would the truth wholly, and never leave them for love nor receiving of silver. For David in his day dubbed knights, and made them swear on their sword to serve Truth for ever; and whosoever passed that point was *apostata*<sup>2</sup> in the order. But Christ, the King of kings, knighted ten Orders, Cherubin, and Seraphin, and seven more such, and one other, and by His majesty gave them

<sup>1</sup> God is love.

<sup>2</sup> Apostate. An *apostata* was "a member of a religious order who renounced it without lawful dispensation" (N. E. D.).

might and made them archangels over his lower servants; then it seemed to them the happier. He taught them through the Trinity to know truth, and to be obedient to His bidding; He bade them nought else.

“Lucifer learned this in Heaven with the legions, but because he obeyed not he lost his bliss, and fell from that fellowship in a fiend’s likeness into a deep dark hell to dwell there for ever; and more thousands than man could number went forth with Lucifer in loathsome form; for they believed upon him who lied in this manner: *Ponam pedem in aquilone, et similis ero altissimo*.<sup>1</sup> And all who hoped it might be so, no heaven might hold them; but they were falling from it in likeness of fiends nine days together, till God of His goodness paused and stayed, and bade the heavens be shut and stand in quiet. When these wicked went forth they fell in wonderful wise; some abode in the air, some on earth, and some deep in hell; but Lucifer lieth lowest of them all. For the pride that he put forth his pain hath no end; and all that do wrong they shall go and dwell with that shrew after their death. But as Holy Writ telleth us, those that do well and make their end, as I said before, in truth (that is the best), may be sure that their soul shall go to Heaven, where truth is, in Trinity, and enthroneth them all. Therefore I say, as I said before, in view of these texts, When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best. Teach it to

<sup>1</sup> I will place my foot in the North, and shall be even as the Most High.

these unlearned men (for the learned men know it)—that Truth is the choicest treasure on earth.”

“Yet have I no understanding,”<sup>1</sup> I said; “still must ye teach me further as to Truth; by what power in my body it commenceth to live, and where.”

“Thou doted daff,” quoth she, “thy wits are dull, thou learnedst too little Latin, man, in thy youth. *Heu michi, quod sterilem duxi vitam iuuenilem!*<sup>2</sup> It is Conscience,<sup>1</sup> verily, that teacheth thee in thy heart to love thy Lord better than thyself, and to do no deadly sin though thou shouldst die for it. This I believe through Truth’s word; if any can tell thee better look that thou suffer him to speak, and then teach it afterwards.

“For thus His word witnesseth, and thereafter do thou, for Truth saith that Love is the balm of Heaven, and no sin can be found in him who useth that sort of healing. All His works He hath wrought with love as it pleased Him, and He taught it to Moses for the worthiest thing and most like to Heaven, and also the plant of peace, most precious of virtues. For Heaven might not hold it,<sup>3</sup> it was so heavy of itself, till it had eaten its fill of the earth. And when it had of this earth taken flesh and blood, there was never leaf upon linden lighter; light and piercing

<sup>1</sup> *Kynde knowing*—i.e., literally, natural understanding, or *Conscience*, as it is translated a few lines further on.

<sup>2</sup> Woe is me! because I have led a barren life in my youth.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., “love; here used of the love of Christ, which heaven could not contain, till it had ‘eaten its fill of the earth’; i.e., participated in the human nature by Incarnation” (*Skeat*).

as the point of a needle, so that no armour nor no high walls might stop it. Therefore is Love the leader of the Lord of Heaven's people, and a mediator, as the Mayor is between the King and the Commons. Right so is Love a leader and maketh the law, and layeth the fine upon a man for his misdeeds. And for to know of it naturally, it beginneth through (Divine) Might<sup>1</sup> and in the heart hath its head and its well-spring.

"For in Conscience (Divine) Might<sup>1</sup> springeth in the heart, and that is of the Father who made us all, who looked on us with love and let His Son die meekly for our misdeeds to amend us all. And yet He wished them no woe who wrought Him that suffering, but meekly He besought Mercy to have pity on the people who tortured Him to death. Here mightest thou see example in Himself alone: that He was mighty and meek and granted mercy to them that hanged Him on high and pierced His heart. Therefore I counsel you rich, have pity of the poor; though ye be powerful to bring to justice, be meek in your deeds; for with the same measure that ye mete, amiss or otherwise, ye shall be weighed therewith when ye go hence. *Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis remecietur vobis.*<sup>2</sup> And though ye be true of tongue, and earn honestly, and as chaste as a child that weepeth in church,<sup>3</sup> yet except ye love

<sup>1</sup> *Myght*, here = *Potestas*, the First Person of the Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> With the same measure which ye shall have measured, it shall be measured to you again.

<sup>3</sup> Probably referring to a child being baptized.

faithfully and give to the poor, and distribute well such goods as God hath sent you, ye shall have no more merit in Mass nor in Hours than Malkyn<sup>1</sup> hath of her maidenhood that no man desireth. For James the Gentle hath declared in his books that faith without the deed is truly nothing worth, and as dead as a door-post unless deeds follow it. *Fides sine operibus mortua est*, etc.<sup>2</sup>

“Therefore Chastity without Charity shall be chained in hell; it is as useless as a lamp that hath no light. Many chaplains are chaste, but charity faileth them; no men are more covetous than they when they are advanced. They are unkind to their kindred and to all Christians; they devour what should be their charity and cry after more. Such chastity without charity shall be chained in hell! Many ‘curatoures’<sup>3</sup> keep them clean of body, but they are cumbered with covetousness, they cannot put it from them, so hardly hath avarice bound them up together. And that is no truth of the Trinity, but treachery of hell, and a lesson to laymen to give alms the later.<sup>4</sup> Therefore these words are written in the gospel: *Date et dabitur vobis*,<sup>5</sup> for I give to you all. And that is the lock of love and letteth out my grace, to comfort the troubled who are cumbered with sin.

<sup>1</sup> A common name for a slatternly woman of the lower classes.

<sup>2</sup> Faith without works is dead, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, one who has the care of souls; *lit.*, an overseer or guardian (N. E. D.).

<sup>4</sup> *I.e.*, to put off giving alms altogether.

<sup>5</sup> Give and it shall be given to you.

“Love is the leech<sup>1</sup> of life, and nearest our Lord Himself, and also the straight way that goeth into Heaven; therefore I say, as I said before, according to the texts, when all treasures be tried Truth is the best.

“Now have I told thee what truth is—that no treasure is better—no longer may I linger with thee. Now our Lord keep thee!”

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, physician.

## PASSUS II.

*Holy Church tells the dreamer of Meed and Falsehood and their proposed marriage—The wedding is arranged, but Theology objects—All the company ride to London to try the case at Westminster—They reach the King's Court, and he vows to punish them ; they all run away, except the Lady Meed.*

YET still I bent my knees and begged her favour, and said: "Pardon, madam, for love of Mary of Heaven, who bare that blessed Child that bought us on the Rood, teach me by some way to know Falsehood."

"Look upon thy left hand and lo, where he standeth! both Falsehood and Flattery and their many fellows!"

I looked on my left hand, as the lady told me, and was aware of a woman beautifully clothed, having a robe bordered with fur the finest on earth; she was crowned with a crown, the King hath no better. Her fingers were daintily adorned with gold wire, and thereon red rubies, as red as any gleed,<sup>1</sup> and diamonds of greatest worth and twofold kind of

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, burning coal or spark of fire.

sapphires, orientals<sup>1</sup> and beryls, to destroy venom.<sup>2</sup> Her robe was exceeding rich, dyed with red scarlet, with bands of red gold and rich stones. Her array ravished me; such riches I had never seen, and I wondered what she was, and whose wife she might be.

"What is this woman," I said, "so nobly attired?"

"That is Meed the Maid,"<sup>3</sup> she answered, "who hath full often vexed me, and hath spoken ill of my lover who is called Loyalty.<sup>4</sup> And she hath belied him to the lords that have to guard the laws. She is as familiar as myself in the Pope's palace; but Truth would not so, for she is a bastard; Flattery<sup>5</sup> was her father, who hath a deceitful tongue, and hath never told the truth since he came upon earth. And Meed is like him, right as kinship requireth. *Qualis pater, talis filius; bona arbor bonum fructum facit.*<sup>6</sup> I ought to be higher than she; I came of a better line. My father is the great God and the ground of every grace, one God without beginning,

<sup>1</sup> Langland's word here is *orientales*—to be distinguished from the preceding word *safferes*. The word "oriental" was prefixed to the names of certain precious stones (oriental ruby, oriental topaz, etc.), denoting a stone different from, but resembling in colour, that bearing the simple name (N. E. D.).

<sup>2</sup> It was held that precious stones could cure diseases, and were a remedy for poison.

<sup>3</sup> The Lady *Meed* represents both *Reward in general* and *Bribery in particular*; her name is sometimes used in one sense only; sometimes with a mingling of both meanings. See Passus IV. for an explanation of the two kinds of Meed.

<sup>4</sup> Or Good-faith.

<sup>5</sup> *Lil.*, *Favel*, as in C-Text, instead of the *Fals* of B-Text.

<sup>6</sup> As the father so the son; a good tree bears good fruit.



and I am His true daughter ; and He hath given me Mercy in marriage, and whatsoever man be merciful and love me loyally, he shall be my lord, and I his beloved in the high Heaven. And whatsoever man taketh Meed, I dare lay my head that for her love he shall lose a share of *Caritas*.<sup>1</sup> How speaketh David the King of the men that take Meed, and the men who maintain Truth ? And the Psalter beareth witness how ye shall save yourselves : *Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo ?* etc.<sup>2</sup>

“And now this Meed is to be married withal to a cursed shrew, to one Falsehood-Fickle<sup>3</sup>-tongue, begotten of a devil. Flattery, through his fair speech, hath bewitched this people, and it is all Liar’s doing that she is thus to be wedded. To-morrow is to be the maiden’s bridal, and there thou mayest see, if thou wilt, who they all are, both the less and the greater, who belong to that company. Learn to know them there, if thou canst, and keep thy tongue, and speak not against them, but let them be, till Loyalty be Justice and have power to punish them ; then put forth thy reason.<sup>4</sup> Now I commit thee to Christ,” quoth she, “and to His pure mother, and let Conscience never weigh upon thee for coveting Meed.”

Thus that lady left me lying asleep.

<sup>1</sup> Charity.

<sup>2</sup> Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle ? etc.

<sup>3</sup> Middle English, *fikel* = treacherous.

<sup>4</sup> This probably means “Then make thy complaint against them.”

And in a dream methought I saw how Meed was married. All the rich retinue that bear rule with the false, on each side, were bidden to the bridal; of all manner of men the mean and the rich. Many a man was assembled to marry this maiden, such as knights and clerks, and also common people; sizers<sup>1</sup> and summoners,<sup>2</sup> sheriffs and their clerks, beadles and bailiffs, and brokers of merchandise, forerunners and victuallers, and advocates of the Court of Arches. I cannot reckon the rout that ran about Meed.

But Simony and Civil<sup>3</sup> and sizers of Courts were most familiar with Meed, methought, of any men; but Flattery was the first that fetched her from her bower, and like a broker, brought her to be joined with Falsehood, and when Simony and Civil saw that this was the will of both, they agreed, for silver, to say as both wished. Then Liar came forth and said, "Lo, here! A charter that Guile with his great oaths hath given to them together!" and he prayed Civil to look and Simony to read it. Then Simony and Civil both stand forth and unfold the deed of gift that Falsehood hath made, and thus these men proclaim with a loud voice:—

"*Sciant presentes et futuri*, etc.<sup>4</sup> Know and witness, ye that dwell upon this earth, that Meed is married more for her goods than for any virtue or beauty, or

<sup>1</sup> A *sisour* was (1) a person deputed to hold assizes; and (2) a juror, though not quite in the modern sense (*Skeaf*).

<sup>2</sup> A *summoner*. An officer whose duty is to summon persons to an ecclesiastical court. Now an *apparitor* (*Cent. Dict.*).

<sup>3</sup> Civil = the Civil Law.

<sup>4</sup> Be it known unto all men, etc.

any noble birth. Falseness is glad of her for he knoweth her to be rich, and Flattery with his guileful speech granteth them, by this charter, to be princes in pride and to despise poverty, to backbite and to boast and to bear false witness, to scorn and to scold and to make slander; bold and disobedient, to break the ten commandments. And the Earldom of Envy and Wrath together; with the little castle of Strife and Chattering-out-of-reason; the County of Covetousness; and all the country round, that is, Usury and Avarice, I grant them entirely, in bargains and in treaties, with all the borough of Theft; and all the length and breadth of the lordship of Lechery, such as deeds and words and glancing of eyes, raiment and wishings, and idle thoughts where the will desireth and the doing faileth." Gluttony he gave them also, together with great oaths, and to drink all day at divers taverns, and there to gossip and gibe and judge their fellow-Christians; and on fasting-days to eat before the full time, and then to sit and sup till sleep assail them, and breed as townswine, and lie in bed easily, till sloth and sleep make their limbs<sup>1</sup> sleek; and then shall Despair<sup>2</sup> awaken them without the will to amend, for they believe themselves lost; this is their last end.

And he gave them to have and to hold and their heirs after them, a dwelling with the devil and be

<sup>1</sup> There is an abrupt change here in the pronouns, from the plural to the singular, which, for the sake of clearness, is left unexpressed in the translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Wanhope* is the fine original word—i.e., *unhope*.

damned for ever, with all the pains of Purgatory in the torment of Hell; yielding their souls to Satan for this thing at one year's end, to suffer torments with him, and to dwell with him in woe while God is in Heaven.

— In witness of which thing Wrong was the first, and Piers the Pardoner of the Pauline Order,<sup>1</sup> Bat the beadle of Buckinghamshire, Rainald the reeve of the Soke of Rutland,<sup>2</sup> Munde the Miller, and many others more. “In the date of the Devil I seal this deed, by the witness of Sir Simony and by leave of Civil.”

Then Theology was vexed when he heard this tale, and said to Civil, “Now mayest thou have sorrow for making such weddings to anger Truth; and ere this wedding be made, woe betide thee! For Meed is a woman begotten of Amends, and God agreeth to give Meed to Truth and thou hast given her to a deceiver. Now God give thee sorrow! Thy text telleth thee not so; Truth knows the truth, for *dignus est operarius*<sup>3</sup> to have his hire, and thou hast joined her to Falsehood. Fie on thy law! For thou livest wholly by lies and by unclean works. Simony and thyself shame Holy Church, and the notaries and ye vex the people; ye shall pay for it both, by God that made me! Well ye wot, liars, except your wits fail you, that Falsehood is faithless and

<sup>1</sup> An order of monks or friars.

<sup>2</sup> The term *soken* or *soke* is a law term, meaning (1) a privilege; (2) (as here) the district within which such a privilege or power is exercised (*Skeat*).

<sup>3</sup> Worthy is the labourer.

treacherous in his works, and was a bastard born of Beelzebub's kin. And Meed is a lady, a wealthy maiden, and might kiss the King for cousin, an she would. Therefore do now according both to wisdom and wit, and take her to London, where the law is declared, and see if any law will let them live together; and though Justices may adjudge her to be joined with Falsehood, yet beware of wedding them, for Truth is wise, and Conscience is of his counsel and knoweth each one of you; and if he find you in fault and holding with the false, full bitterly shall it beset your souls at the last."

Civil assenteth hereto, but Simony would not until he had silver for his service, as well as the notaries. Then Flattery brought forth florins enough, and bade Guile give gold all about, and especially to the notaries that none might fail them, and to fee False-witness with florins enough, "For he can manage Meed and bring about my will."

When this gold was given, great were the thanks to Falsehood and to Flattery for their fair gifts, and they came to comfort Falsehood against anxiety, and said, "Certes, sir, we shall never cease till Meed through all our wits be thy wedded wife. For we have managed Meed with our pleasant speech so that she agreeth with a good will to go to London, to see if the law would adjudge you together in joy for ever."

Then was Falseness glad and Flattery also pleased, and caused all men in the shires round about to be summoned, and bade them all be ready, beggars and

others, to go with them to Westminster to witness this thing. But then were they in a strait for horses to take them thither, and Flattery fetched forth many foals, and set Meed upon a sheriff all newly shod, and Falsehood sat on a sizer that trotted gently, and Flattery on a flatterer finely attired. But when the notaries had no horses they were vexed, because Simony and Civil must go on foot. And then Simony and Civil both swore that summoners should be saddled and serve for each of them, and they bade apparel the provisors<sup>1</sup> like palfreys. "Sir Simony himself shall sit upon their back. Bring together deans and subdeans; and let them saddle archdeacons and officials and all your registrars with silver, that they may allow our sins, such as adultery, divorce, and secret usury, and carry bishops about on their visitations. The friends of the Paulines, as to complaints in the Consistory, shall serve me who am called Civil; and harness the commissary<sup>2</sup> and he shall draw our cart, and provide us victuals from *fornicatores*. And make of Liar a long cart to take all these others, such as friars and vagabonds that run on foot."

And thus went forth Falsehood and Flattery together, and Meed in the middle, and all these men after. I cannot stay to tell of the train of all manner

<sup>1</sup> *Provisor* = the holder of a provision or grant, giving him the right to be presented to a benefice on the next vacancy (N. E. D.).

<sup>2</sup> An officer to whom a bishop delegates certain duties in his own absence, or in distant parts of a diocese.

of men that follow them, but Guile was their outrider and led them all.

Soothness saw them full well and said but little, and spurred his palfrey and passed them all; he came to the King's Court and told it to Conscience, and Conscience afterwards told it again to the King.

"Now, by Christ," quoth the King, "an I might catch Falsehood or Flattery, or any of his fellows, I would be avenged on those wretches that do so ill, and let hang them by the neck, and all that abet them. No man on earth shall go bail for the least of them, but right as the law will find, so let fall on them all."

And he commanded a constable to come straightway to "Arrest those oppressors at any cost, I bid you; and fetter Falseness fast, in spite of any gifts, and cut off Guile's head, and let him go no further. And if ye catch Liar, let him not escape for any prayer, I command you, till he be put in the pillory; and bring Meed to me in spite of them all."

Dread stood at the door and heard the judgment, and how the King commanded constables and servants to fetter and bind Falseness and his company. Then Dread went quickly and warned Falsehood, and bade him and all his fellows flee for fear. Falseness for fear then fled to the friars; and Guile was almost affrighted to death, but merchants met with him and made him stay with them, and shut him up in their shops to show their wares, and apparelled him as a prentice to serve the people.

Then Liar ran quickly away, lurking in the lanes,

lugged here and there by many a one. For his many lying tales he was nowhere welcome, but everywhere he was hooted at and bidden pack off, until the pardoners had pity on him and pulled him indoors. They washed him and wiped him, and clothed him in old raiment, and sent him with seals to churches on Sundays, and he gave about pardons for pence, by pounds at a time. Then the leeches began to lour, and sent letters for Liar to dwell with them. Sellers of spices spoke with him to look at their wares, for he understood their trade and knew many gums. But minstrels and messengers once met him, and held him half a year and eleven days. Friars with fair speech fetched him thence, and clothed him as a friar, that strangers may not know him; but he hath leave to go out as oft as pleaseth him, and when he will stay is welcome, and often he dwelleth with them.<sup>1</sup>

All fled away for fear and escaped into corners, save Meed the Maid none other durst abide. But to tell truly, she was trembling for fear, and she wept also and wrung her hands when she was taken.

<sup>1</sup> The C-Text adds: "Simony and Civil sent to Rome, and by appeals put themselves in the Pope's favour. But Conscience accused them both to the King, and said, 'By Christ, Sir King, except these clerks amend, thy kingdom will grow evil through their avarice, and Holy Church through them be injured for ever.'"



### PASSUS III.

*Meed is brought to the King's presence, who bids that she be well lodged—The Justices and others visit her—She is shriven—The King proposes that she shall marry Conscience—Conscience refuses, and exposes her—She retaliates and Conscience refutes her.*

Now with beadles and bailiffs Meed the Maid, and none other of them all, is brought before the King. And the King called a clerk, his name I know not, to take Meed the Maid and lodge her in comfort.

“I will try her myself, and question her, verily, What man on earth might be dearest to her; and if she do after my counsel and follow my will, I will forgive her this guilt, so God help me.”

Then the clerk did as the King bade, and took Meed courteously by the waist and brought her to a chamber: and there was mirth and minstrelsy to please Meed. They that dwell in Westminster all honoured her; and some of the Justices, by the leave of Learning, betook them graciously and gladly to the chamber where the lady dwelt, that they might comfort her kindly, and said:

“Mourn not, Meed, nor be sorrowful, for we will counsel the King, and make way for thee to be

wedded at thy will and where it pleaseth thee, notwithstanding all device or craft of Conscience, as I trow!"

Then Meed thanked them all meekly for their great goodness, and gave to each of them goblets of pure gold, and cups of silver; rings with rubies, and many other rich things; she gave the least man of their train a coin<sup>1</sup> of gold; and then these lords took their leave of Meed.

With that came clerks likewise to comfort her; and they bade her be blithe, "For we are thine own to do thy will as long as thou mayest last." Then, graciously she promised them likewise to "Love you faithfully and to make you lords, and in the Consistory at the Court to have your names called, and no ignorance shall hinder the man that I love, that he be not advanced to the first place, for I am acknowledged where clever clerks must lag behind!"

Then came there a confessor clothed as a friar, to Meed the Maid he spoke these words, and said full softly, as it were in confession: "Though men learned and unlearned had both lain by thee, and though Falseness had followed thee all these fifty winters, I will absolve thee myself for a horse-load of wheat, and also be thy beadsman,<sup>2</sup> and bear well thy message to knights and clerks that Conscience may be turned."

Then Meed for her misdeeds kneeled to that man,

<sup>1</sup> *Lit.*, a *motoun* of gold, because it bore upon one side the impression of a *lamb* or *mutton*.

<sup>2</sup> One who prays for another for money.

and I trow she shrived her shamelessly of her wickedness ; she told him a lying tale, and gave him a noble that he might be her beadsman and her broker also. Then he soon absolved her, and said afterwards :

“ We have a window a-making which will cost us full much, wouldst thou glaze that gable<sup>1</sup> and grave thy name therein, sure would thy soul be of having heaven.”

“ Wist I that,” quoth the woman, “ I would not spare to be your friend, friar, and never fail you. Have mercy on men that follow lechery, and I will roof your church and build your cloisters, whiten your walls and glaze your windows, and paint and picture and pay for the work, so that every one shall say I am a sister of your house.”

But<sup>2</sup> God forbiddeth all good people such engraving, that they should write their good deeds in windows, lest pride and pomp of the world be painted there. For Christ knoweth thy conscience and thine inmost will, and thy spending and thy covetousness, and who owned the wealth. Therefore I counsel you, lords, leave such doings, that ye write your good deeds in windows or call for God’s men<sup>3</sup> when ye give alms, lest ye have your reward here and your heaven also. *Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextra.*<sup>4</sup> Let not thy left side know,

<sup>1</sup> Gable-end of a church.

<sup>2</sup> This passage is the author’s reflection on the transaction above.

<sup>3</sup> That is, send for the friars.

<sup>4</sup> Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth.

neither late nor early, what thou doest with thy right side, for thus the gospel biddeth good men give their alms. } Mayors and officers<sup>1</sup> are the means between the King and the Commons to guard the laws, and to punish in pillories and on stools of punishment, brewers and bakers, butchers and cooks; for these are the men on earth that do most harm to the poor people who buy in small portions. For they often poison the people privily, and they grow rich through their *regraterye*,<sup>2</sup> and get revenue<sup>3</sup> for themselves with what the poor people should put in their belly. Had they made their wealth in honesty they had not built such high houses nor bought tenements for themselves,<sup>4</sup> be ye full certain.

But Meed the Maid hath besought the Mayor to take from all such sellers silver, or presents without pence, whether cups of silver, rings, or other riches, to maintain these *regrateres*.<sup>5</sup> "For my love," quoth the lady, "love them every one, and suffer them to sell somewhat against reason."

— Solomon the Sage made a sermon for amendment

<sup>1</sup> *Lit.*, mace-bearers—i.e., officers of the courts of justice.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, retail trade.

<sup>3</sup> *Rentes* = that which is rendered in return for investments.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix, p. 135, for additional lines of C.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Dream of John Butl*, William Morris characterizes the *Forestaller* as "one who buys up goods when they are cheap and so raises the price for his own benefit; forestalls the due and real demand"; and the *Regrater* as "one who both buys and sells in the same market, or within five miles thereof; buys, say, a ton of cheese at 10 a.m. and sells it at 5 p.m. a penny a pound dearer without moving from his chair. The word *monopolist* will cover both species of thief."

of mayors and men who guard the laws, and told them this text that I think to tell; *Ignis devorabit tabernacula eorum qui libenter accipiunt munera*, etc.<sup>1</sup> Among learned men this Latin meaneth that fire shall fall, and burn all to blue ashes the houses and the homes of them that desire gifts or year-gifts<sup>2</sup> because of their office.

Now the King came from his Council and called for Meed, and sent for her quickly as could be with many officers, who brought her to the chamber blissfully and joyfully.

Then the King began to speak courteously to Meed the Maid, and saith these words:

“Woman, unwisely thou hast often done, but worse didst thou never than when thou tookest Falsehood. But I forgive thee that guilt and grant thee my favour; henceforth, to thy day of death, do so no more.<sup>3</sup> I have a knight, Conscience, who hath lately come from over-sea;<sup>4</sup> if he wish thee to wife, wilt thou have him?”

<sup>1</sup> Fire shall devour the tabernacles of those who have willingly received gifts (bribery).

<sup>2</sup> A year-gift is a toll or fine taken by the King's officers on a person's entering an office, and is really a bribe given to them to connive at extortion or other offences in him who gives it (*Skeat*).

<sup>3</sup> C-Text adds: “If thou be again taken in offence, I will shut thee up as if thou wert an anchorite, in the Castle of Corfe or a much worse dwelling, and mar thee with torture, by St. Mary, so that all wanton women shall beware because of thee.”

<sup>4</sup> *Lit.*, “beyond.”

"Yea, lord," said the lady. "Lord forbid otherwise; except I be wholly at your bidding, let hang me soon!"

And then Conscience was called to come and appear before the King and his Council, such as clerks and others. Conscience, kneeling, bowed low to the King, to know what his will might be, and what he should do.

"Wilt thou wed this woman?" said the King, "if I will assent, for she is eager for thy fellowship, to be thy mate?"

Quoth Conscience to the King, "Christ forbid it me! Ere I wed such a wife, woe betide me! For her faith is frail and her speech fickle, and she maketh men do wrong many score of times. Trust in her treasure betrayeth full many. She teacheth wantonness to wives and widows, and lechery to them that love her gifts; she made your father fall through false promises, and she hath poisoned popes and injured Holy Church. Sizers and summoners, such the men who praise her, and if she were not, the sheriffs of shires were undone. For she maketh men lose both their land and life, and she letteth prisoners go and often payeth for them, and giveth the jailors both gold and groats, if they will unfetter the false to flee where it pleaseth him; and she taketh the true man by the hair and tieth him fast, and for hatred hangeth him that never did harm. She careth not a rush to be cursed in court, for she doth clothe the commissary and his clerks; she is absolved as soon as it pleaseth her, and can do nigh

as much in one single month as your private seal in six score days. For she is familiar with the Pope, as provisors know, for Sir Simony and herself seal their bulls. She blesseth the bishops though they be ignorant, provideth parsons with prebends, and abetteth priests in having lovers and concubines all their days, and in bringing forth children against the law's command. Where she is well with the King woe is the kingdom, for she favoureth the false and often revileth Truth. By Jesus! with her jewels she corrupteth your Justices and lieth against the law, and stoppeth the way so that Loyalty cannot go forward, her florins are so thick. She conducteth the law as she listeth and maketh love-days,<sup>1</sup> and causeth men to lose through her love what law might win; it is confusion for a poor man though he plead for ever here. Law is so lordly and loath to make an end: without presents or pence she pleaseth very few.

“She bringeth barons and burgesses into sorrow, and all the Commons into trouble that wish to live honestly; she coupleth together learning and avarice. This is the life of that lady! Now the Lord give her sorrow! And all that help her men, mischance betide them! For poor men, though they smart, may have no power to complain, Meed is such a master among men of wealth.”

Then Meed lamented, and bemoaned her to the

<sup>1</sup> *Love-day*. A day appointed for meetings to settle disputes amicably. The text implies that injustice was done at these meetings (N. E. D.).

King, and prayed to have space to speak, if she might so speed.

The King with a good will granted her grace: "Excuse thee, if thou canst, I can say no more, for Conscience accuseth thee to rid himself of thee for ever."

"Nay, lord," quoth the lady, "believe him the less when ye know indeed where the wrong lieth. Meed can help where is great misfortune. And thou knowest, Conscience, I have come not to strive, nor with a proud heart to revile thy person. Well thou dost know, deceiver, except thou wilt lie, that thou hast hung on my side eleven times, and seized also my gold and given it where it pleased thee; and why thou art angry now is a wonder to me. Still I may honour thee with gifts after my power, and uphold thy manhood more than thou knowest. But thou hast foully defamed me here before the King, for I never killed any king, nor counselled it, nor did as thou deemest. I call the King to witness!<sup>1</sup>

"In Normandy for my sake he was not harmed;<sup>2</sup> but thou thyself truly often shamedst him; thou didst creep into a cabin against the cold in thy nails, and didst ween that winter would have lasted

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 136, for additional lines of C-Text.

<sup>2</sup> This alludes to Edward III.'s wars in Normandy and to the Treaty of Bretigny, signed May 8, 1360. Edward there renounced his claim to the crown of France, and the greater part of his so-called possessions in that country. He also restored all his conquests except Calais and Guisnes. The Dauphin of France promised to pay a ransom of three million crowns of gold for the ransom of his father, King John.



for ever, and didst dread thou wouldst die for a dim cloud, and didst hie homeward for thy belly's hunger.<sup>1</sup> Without pity, thief, thou didst rob poor men and didst bear their brass on thy back to sell at Calais; whereas I stayed here with my lord to save his life; I made his men merry and stopped their mourning and patted them on their back and emboldened their hearts, and made them dance for hope that they might have me at their will. Had I been marshal of his men, by Mary of Heaven, I durst have laid my life, and no less a pledge, he should have been lord of that land in length and breadth, and also king of that country to help his kindred,—the least child of his blood a baron's peer! Thou, Conscience, coward-like, didst counsel him to go hence, and for a little silver to leave his lordship, that is the richest realm over which the rain hovereth.

“It becometh a king who hath care of a kingdom

<sup>1</sup> This passage alludes to the sufferings of the English in their retreat from Paris to Bretagne. They met a lengthened winter, storm and famine. Froissart vividly describes the storm (the “dim cloud”) and its effect on the English King and his men thus: “Car il avint à lui et à toutes ses gens un grand miracle, lui étant devant Chartres, qui moult humilia et brisu son courage. . . . Car un temps et un effondre et un orage si grand et si horrible descendit du ciel en l’ost du roi d’Angleterre que il sembla bien proprement que le siècle dut finir; car il chéoit de l’air pierres si grosses que elles tuoient hommes et chevaux, et en furent les plus hardis tous ebahis. Et adonc regarda le roi d’Angleterre devers l’église Notre Dame de Chartres et se rendit et vout à Notre Dame dévotement et promit, si comme il dit et confessa depuis que il s’accorderait à la paix” (*Les Chroniques de Jean Froissart*, Chap. CDXLVI., Paris, 1824, Vol. IV.).

to give Meed to men who serve him humbly, and to honour aliens and all men with gifts. Meed maketh him beloved and held as a man. Emperors and earls, and every manner of lord, have young men to run and ride, because of gifts; the Pope and all prelates receive presents, and themselves need men to maintain their laws. Full well we see the truth; servants for their service take Meed from their masters, according as they may agree; beggars in their begging ask Meed of men; minstrels for their mirth, they ask Meed; the King to keep peace in the land hath Meed from his men; men that teach children crave Meed for them; priests that preach to the people for good, ask Meed, and pence for masses, and their meat at meal-times; craftsmen of every kind crave Meed for their prentices; merchants and Meed must needs go together; no creature can live without Meed, I ween.”<sup>1</sup>

Said the King to Conscience, “By Christ, methinketh Meed is well worthy to have the mastery.”

“Nay,” quoth Conscience to the King, and kneeled on the earth, “there are two manner of Meeds, my lord, by your leave. The one, God of His grace, granteth in His bliss to those that do well while they are here. The prophet preacheth thereof and putteth it in the Psalter; *Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo?*<sup>2</sup> ‘Lord, who shall dwell in Thy habitations and with Thy holy saints, or rest on Thy holy hills?’ David asketh this; and

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 137, for additional lines in C-Text.

<sup>2</sup> Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?

David explaineth it himself, as the Psalter saith : *Qui ingreditur sine macula et operatur justiciam*,<sup>1</sup> Those that enter spotless<sup>2</sup> and of one will, and have wrought works of right and reason : and he that followeth not the life of usury, and teacheth poor men and pursueth truth ; *qui pecuniam suam non dedit ad usuram, et munera super innocentem*,<sup>3</sup> etc., and all that help the innocent and hold with the righteous, and do them good without Meed and help the truth,—such manner of men, my lord, shall have this first Meed from God in their great need when they go hence.

“ There is another unrighteous<sup>4</sup> Meed that masters desire ; they take Meed to abet misdoers ; and thereof the Psalter says at the end of a psalm, *In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt, dextera eorum repleta est muneribus*,<sup>5</sup> and he that graspeth at her gold, so God help me, shall pay for it bitterly, or the Book lieth. Priests and parsons that desire pleasure and take Meed and money for the masses they sing, have their Meed here, as Matthew teacheth us : *Amen, amen, receperunt mercedem suam*.<sup>6</sup> What labourers and humble folk receive from their masters is no kind of Meed but a rightful hire. In trading there

<sup>1</sup> Whoso enters without spot and works justice.

<sup>2</sup> *Lit.*, “ of one colour.”

<sup>3</sup> Whoso hath not given his money to the usurer and received gifts against the innocent.

<sup>4</sup> *Lit.*, “ measureless,” “ immoderate.”

<sup>5</sup> In whose hands are iniquities, whose right hand is full of gifts.

<sup>6</sup> Verily, verily, they have received their reward.

is no Meed, I can well avow; it is plainly an exchange, one pennyworth for another.<sup>1</sup> But thou, recreant Meed, didst thou never read *Regum*<sup>2</sup> why the vengeance fell on Saul and on his children? God sent and said to Saul by Samuel the prophet that Agag of Amalek and all his people must die for a deed their fathers had done. 'Therefore,' said Samuel to Saul, 'God Himself commanded thee be obedient to His bidding and fulfil His will. Go to Amalek with thine host, and what thou findest there, slay it; burn to death men and beasts, widows and wives, women and children, goods of every kind;<sup>3</sup> and all that thou canst find, burn it, bear it not away for Meed nor money, be it never so rich; see thou destroy it, kill and spare not, and thou shalt speed the better.' And because he coveted their cattle, and spared the king, and forbore to kill both him and his beasts, otherwise than he was warned of the prophet, as the Bible witnesseth, God said to Samuel that Saul should die, and for that sin all his seed come to a shameful end. Such ruin Meed made Saul the King to have, so that God hated him and all his heirs for ever after. The *culorum*<sup>4</sup> of this matter I care not to show; in case it should vex men I will make no end. For it is ever the way of

<sup>1</sup> C-Text here inserts a long passage.

<sup>2</sup> (The Book) of Kings.

<sup>3</sup> *Lit.*, "movables and unmovables."

<sup>4</sup> Conclusion, moral or corollary. Probably the last syllables of the phrase which ends the *Gloria Patri*—in *Sæcula sæculorum*. Maetzner, however, suggests a corruption of Latin *corollarium*, corollary (N. E. D.).

the world with them that have power, that whosoever saith the truth to them is soonest blamed.

"I, Conscience, know this, for Mother-wit taught me it, that Reason shall reign and govern kingdoms; and right as to Agag it happened so it shall to some others. Samuel shall slay him and Saul shall be blamed and David shall be crowned and subdue them all; and one Christian king shall rule them all. Meed shall no more be master, as she is now, but Love and Lowliness and Loyalty together shall be masters on earth to save Truth. And whosoever trespasseth against Truth or goeth against his will, Loyalty shall give him law and no man else. No serjeant shall wear a silken coif for his service, nor fur on his cloak for pleading at the bar. Meed maketh of evil-doers many lords, and ruleth the kingdoms despite the lords' laws.

"But Love<sup>1</sup> and Conscience shall come together, and make a labourer of Law; for such love shall arise, and such peace among the people, and perfect truth, that the Jews shall wax wondrous glad, and think in their minds that Moses or Messiah be come to the earth, and shall wonder in their hearts that men be so true.

"All that bear a baselard,<sup>2</sup> broad sword or lance, an axe or a hatchet or any weapon else, shall be doomed to death except he cause it to be smithied

<sup>1</sup> The original word here is *kynde love*—i.e., lit., natural or human love.

<sup>2</sup> A special kind of dagger, said to have been usually worn at the girdle (N. E. D.).

into sickle or scythe or ploughshare or coulter; *conflabunt gladios suos in vomeres*,<sup>1</sup> etc.; and every man shall busy himself with a plough, pickaxe or spade, shall spin or spread dung, or else must he waste himself in sloth. Priests and parsons shall hunt with *placebo*<sup>2</sup> and ding upon David<sup>3</sup> every day till evening, and if any of them shall hunt or hawk, the benefice that was his boast shall then be taken from him. Neither king nor knight, constable nor mayor, shall override the commons, nor summon them to the Court, nor empanel them<sup>4</sup> to make them pledge their truth, but judgment shall be given according to the deed that is done, mercy or no mercy as Truth will agree. King's Court and Common Court, Consistory and Chapter, all shall be but one court and one baron be Justice. Then shall live True-tongue, an honest man who never vexed me. No battles shall there be, nor shall any man bear weapon, and whatsoever smith shall smithy any he shall be therewith smitten to death. *Non levabit gens contra gentem gladium*,<sup>5</sup> etc. But ere this fortune befall men shall feel the worst, by six suns and a ship and half a sheaf of arrows; and the middle of a moon shall make the Jews turn, and

<sup>1</sup> They shall melt their swords into ploughshares.

<sup>2</sup> *Lit.*, "I will please," or "find favour with." The opening phrase of Psa. cxvi. 9. *To hunt with placebo* = to be diligent in singing *placebo*—i.e., in saying the Office for the dead, in which occurs the antiphon beginning *Placebo domino*.

<sup>3</sup> *Dyngen upon David*—i.e., to sing the Psalms.

<sup>4</sup> *Lit.*, "put them on a panel"—i.e., on the list of jurors.

<sup>5</sup> Nation shall not raise sword against nation.

Saracens for that sight shall sing *Gloria in excelsis*,<sup>1</sup> for ill hap at that time shall befall Mahomet and Meed.<sup>2</sup> For, *melius est bonum nomen quam diuicie multe*."<sup>3</sup>

Meed waxed as wroth as the wind in a moment. "I can no Latin," said she, "clerks know the truth. See what Solomon saith in the Books of Wisdom, that they that give gifts win the victory, and he had much worship therewith, as Holy Writ telleth. *Honorem adquiret qui dat munera*,"<sup>4</sup> etc.

"I well believe, lady," quoth Conscience, "that thy Latin be true; but thou art like a lady that read a lesson once, and it was *omnia probate*,<sup>5</sup> and that pleased her heart, for no longer was that line at the leaf's end. Had she looked the other side, and turned the leaf, she should have found many words following thereafter, *quod bonum est tenete*.<sup>6</sup> Truth made that text. And so fared ye, Madam! Ye could find no more when ye looked on Wisdom sitting at your study. This text that ye have said,

<sup>1</sup> Glory in the highest.

<sup>2</sup> The whole of this passage is a fanciful prophecy which hints at a final time when Jews and Mahometans shall be converted. Professor Skeat thus explains it: "The Paschal full moon (with the events of the crucifixion) shall cause the Jews to be converted to Christianity; and next, at the sight of their conversion, Saracens also shall declare their belief in the Holy Ghost; for both Mohammed and Meed shall then meet with ill-success."

<sup>3</sup> Better is a good name than much riches.

<sup>4</sup> He shall win honour who giveth gifts.

<sup>5</sup> Prove all things.

<sup>6</sup> Hold fast that which is good.

would be good for lords, but a clever clerk failed you that could have turned the leaf! And if ye look at Wisdom again ye shall find what followeth, a full harmful text to them that take Meed, and that is *Animam autem aufert accipientium*,<sup>1</sup> etc., and that is the end of that text that ye before showed—that though with Meed we may win worship and have victory, the soul that taketh the gift by so much is bound.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For he wins the soul of the receivers (of gifts).

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, the man who takes the gift is to that extent under an obligation.



#### PASSUS IV.

*The King orders Reason to be sent for—He comes with Wit and Wisdom—The petition of Peace against Wrong, who tries to buy off Peace with Meed's help—Reason is relentless and counsels the King to act with justice—The King agrees, and asks Reason to stay with him for ever.*

"CEASE," saith the King, "I will no longer suffer you ; ye shall be reconciled, forsooth, and both serve me. Kiss her, Conscience, I bid you," quoth the King.

"Nay, by Christ," said Conscience, "dismiss me for ever ! Save Reason counsel me thereto, rather will I die !"

Then quoth the King to Conscience, "I command thee hasten to ride and fetch Reason ; command him that he come to hear my counsel, for he shall rule my kingdom and advise me for the best, and shall reckon with thee, Conscience, so Christ help me, how thou dost teach the people, both learned and unlearned !"

"I am glad of that agreement," then said the man, and he rideth straight to Reason and whispereth in his ear, and said as the King bade, and after took his leave.

"Tarry thee awhile," said Reason, "I will array me to ride;" and he called Cato his servant, who was courteous of speech, and also Tom-true-tongue-tell-me-no-foles-nor-idle-stories-to-laugh-at-for-I-loved-them-never. And set my saddle upon Suffer-till-I-see-my-time, and gird him well with the girths of Wise-word, and hang on him the heavy bridle to hold his head low, for he will neigh twice<sup>1</sup> ere he be there."

Then Conscience goeth forward fast upon his horse, and Reason rideth with him, and they talk together of all the tyrannies Meed maketh upon the earth. One Waryn Wisdom and Witty<sup>2</sup> his fellow followed them fast, for they had somewhat to do in the Exchequer, and in Chancery things to be discharged; and they rode fast that Reason might advise them the best, for silver, to save them from shame and trouble. And Conscience knew well that they loved Covetousness, and he bade Reason ride fast and reck of neither of them. "There are wiles in their words and they dwell with Meed; where wrath and wrangling are there they win silver, but where are love and loyalty they will not come. *Contricio et infelicitas in vijs eorum*,<sup>3</sup> etc. They care not one goose wing for God, *non est timor dei ante oculos eorum*.<sup>4</sup> For God knoweth they would do more for a dozen chickens, or as many capons, or

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, be impatient.

<sup>2</sup> Witty = clever or crafty.

<sup>3</sup> Sorrow and unhappiness are in their ways.

<sup>4</sup> The fear of God is not before their eyes.

for a horse-load of oats, than for love of our Lord or all His dear saints. Therefore, Reason, let those rich ones ride by themselves, for neither Conscience nor Christ knoweth them, as I trow. And then Reason rode fast on the straight highway, as Conscience showed him, till they came to the King.

Then the King came courteously to meet Reason, and set him on the bench between himself and his son, and they talked together very wisely a great while.

And then Peace came into Parliament and put forth a petition, how that Wrong had taken his wife against his will, and had evilly entreated Rose, Reginald's love, and Margaret, in spite of their checks. "His fellows steal both my geese and my pigs, and for fear of him I dare not fight nor complain.<sup>1</sup> He borrowed a horse of me and he never brought him home, nor any farthing for him, for aught I could plead. He abetteth his men in murdering my servants, he forestalleth my sales<sup>2</sup> at fairs, and wrangleth in my market, and breaketh up my barn door and beareth away my wheat, and giveth me but a tally<sup>3</sup> for ten quarters of oats; and he beateth me also and lieth by my maid, I hardly dare look about me because of him."

<sup>1</sup> C-Text adds: "In faith, because of his men I dare not bear any silver in safety to St. Giles's Down. Full well he watcheth when I take silver, and right eagerly he espieth which way I go, that he may rob and rifle me if I ride softly."

<sup>2</sup> For *forestall*, see note on p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> The tally was a wooden stick, one of a pair that *tallied*, with notches in it to indicate the sum lent or owing.

The King knew he said truth, for Conscience told him that Wrong was a wicked fellow and wrought much sorrow. Then Wrong was afraid, and he sought Wisdom that with his pence he might make peace, and offered him many pence and said, "Had I the favour of my Lord the King little would I reck, though Peace and all his power complained to him for ever."

Then Wisdom and Sir Waryn the Witty, because Wrong had wrought so wicked a deed, went and warned Wrong with this wise talk: "Whoso worketh after his own will often causeth wrath, I say it concerning thyself, thou shalt indeed find it so. Except Meed manage it thy ruin is certain, for both thy life and thy land lie in his favour."

Then Wrong wooed Wisdom very eagerly, and that he might make peace with his pence paid *handy dandy*;<sup>1</sup> and then Wisdom and Wit went together, and took Meed with them, to get pardon for Wrong.

Peace came forth with a bloody pate. "Without guilt, God wot, gat I this hurt; Conscience and the Commons know the truth."

But Wisdom and Wit wrought diligently to overcome the King with money, if they could.

The King swore both by Christ and his crown that Wrong should suffer punishment for his deeds, and commanded a constable to put him in irons, "And let him not see his feet once these seven years."

<sup>1</sup> Something held or offered in the closed hand; a covert bribe or present (N. E. D.).

"God wot," said Wisdom, "that were not the best. If he can make amends let Bail have him, and be surety for his wrong, and buy him a remedy, and so amend what is misdome, and be the better evermore."

Wit agreed thereto and said the same. "Better is it for Redress<sup>1</sup> to overcome Wrong,<sup>2</sup> than for Wrong to be beaten and Redress be none the better off."

Then Meed humbled herself and besought mercy, and offered Peace a present of pure gold. "Take this, man, from me," she said, "to amend thine hurt, for I will be surety for Wrong he will do so no more."

Then Peace piteously besought the King to have mercy on the man who so often had wrought him ill, "For he hath given me good surety as Wisdom hath taught him, and with a good will I forgive him that guilt, and if the King assent I cannot say further; for Meed hath made me amends, I can ask no more."

"Nay," said the King then, "so Christ help me, Wrong goeth not thus away, I will first know more; for he would laugh if he should escape so easily, and be afterwards the bolder to beat my servants; except Reason have pity on him he shall stay in my stocks, and that as long as he liveth, except Lowliness be his surety."

Some men then advised Reason to have pity on that shrew, and also to counsel thus the King and Conscience, and they besought Reason that Meed might be bail.

<sup>1</sup> *Lit.*, boot or remedy.

<sup>2</sup> *Lit.*, bale or evil.

"Counsel me not to have pity," said Reason, "till lords and ladies all love truth, and all hate harlotry, to hear it or speak it, and till Pernel's<sup>1</sup> finery be put in her box, and the cherishing<sup>2</sup> of children be chastising with rods, and harlots' holiness be held worth a hind;<sup>3</sup> till clerks be covetous to clothe and feed the poor, and religious<sup>4</sup> who roam on pilgrimage say *recordare*<sup>5</sup> in their cloisters as St. Benedict, Bernard, and Francis bade them; and till preachers' preaching be proved on themselves; till the King's counsel be the common profit; till bishops' horses become beggars' chambers,<sup>6</sup> and their hawks and their hounds help the poor Orders; and till St. James be sought where I shall appoint<sup>7</sup> so that no man go to Galicia except he go for ever; and until all runners to Rome bear over sea no silver that carrieth the King's image, to enrich robbers who dwell yonder; neither gold nor silver graven nor ungraven, on pain of its forfeiture if any man find him at Dover; except

<sup>1</sup> A proverbial name of the same kind as *Malkyn*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, over-indulgence or spoiling.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, of small value, of common occurrence. A hind or farm-labourer was not of great value. *Harlot* in Middle English is applied both to men and women, and is often used in the sense of *ribald*, rather than in its modern meaning.

<sup>4</sup> *I.e.*, any one of a religious order.

<sup>5</sup> "Remember"; the first word of a Mass for avoiding sudden death.

<sup>6</sup> *I.e.*, till the money spent by bishops on horses go to furnish rooms for beggars.

<sup>7</sup> The C-Text has, "Till St. James be sought where the poor sick lie, in prisons and poor cots, instead of pilgrimage to Rome."

it be a merchant or his man, or messenger with letters, provisor or priest, or penitent for his sins.

“And still,” quoth Reason, “by the Rood, I will have no pity while Meed hath the mastery in this judgment hall; but I may show forth examples as at times I see them. As for myself,” he said, “if so it were that I were a crowned king to guard a realm, never should wrong in this world, that I could know, go unpunished, to my soul’s peril, as far as in me lay. Nor my favour got by gifts, so God save me, nor mercy be had for Meed except through Meekness. For the man *nullum malum met* with *impunitum*, and bade *nullum bonum* be *irremuneratum*.<sup>1</sup> Let your confessor, Sir King, explain this without gloss;<sup>2</sup> and if ye fulfil it in deeds, I pledge mine ears that Law shall be a labourer and carry dung a-field, and Love shall rule thy land as shall please thee best.”

Then clerks that were confessors joined together to interpret this clause, and for the King’s profit, but not for the Commons’ comfort nor for the King’s soul. For in the judgment hall, I saw Meed wink on the men of law, and they went to her laughing, and many left Reason.

Waryn Wisdom winked upon Meed and said, “Madam, I am your man, whatsoever my mouth may prate of; I fall in with florins,” quoth the fellow, “and often fail in speech.”

<sup>1</sup> The man named *No evil* met with one called *Unpunished*, and bade *No Good* be *unrewarded*.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary.

All the just declared that Reason said truth, and Wit agreed thereto and commended his words, and so did most people in the hall, and many of the crowd, and they held Meekness a master and Meed a cursed shrew. Love held her lightly and Loyalty thought still less of her, and said it so loudly that all the hall heard it. "Whosoever for the wealth of her goods desireth her to wife, except he be known for a cuckold cut off my nose!"

Then Meed bemoaned and made heavy cheer, because the lowest in the court called her a whore. But a sizer and a summoner quickly followed her, and a sheriff's clerk cursed all the rout. "For often," said he, "I have helped you at the Bar, and yet ye never gave me the worth of a rush."

And the King called Conscience, and then Reason, and declared that Reason had spoken rightly; and the King looked mighty angrily upon Meed, and waxed wroth with Law because Meed had almost ruined it, and said, "Through your Law, so I believe, I lose many escheats;<sup>1</sup> Meed overmastereth Law and doth hinder Truth greatly. But Reason shall reckon with you, if I reign any time; and he shall sentence you, even as to-day, as ye have deserved. Meed shall not bail you, by the Mary of Heaven! I will have loyalty in Law and make cease all your talk, and right as most men witness so shall Wrong be sentenced."

Said Conscience to the King, "Except the Commons will assent, it is full hard, by my head, to

<sup>1</sup> Property reverting to the King.



bring it about, and thus to rule all your liege people fairly."

"By Him who hung on the Rood," said Reason to the King, "except I rule your realm thus, may ye rend my ribs, if that ye bid Obedience agree with me."

"And I agree," saith the King, "by St. Mary my Lady, when my council of clerks and earls is come; but thou shalt not lightly depart from me, Reason, for as long as I live I will never let thee go."

"I am ready," quoth Reason, "to remain ever with you; so Conscience be of our council, I care for nothing better."

"And I grant it," said the King; "God forbid it should fail; as long as our life lasteth may we live together!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, pp. 138-143, for the passages of the C-Text, which now follow.

## PASSUS V.

*The Dreamer awakes, but sleeps again—He sees the Field, and Reason preaching—Reason's sermon—The confession of the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Repentance of Robert the Robber—Repentance prays for all of them—They all set out to find Truth, but none know the way—Piers the Plowman says he will show them, and describes the way.*

THE King and his knights went to church to hear Matins of the day, and afterwards the Mass. Then I awoke from my sleep, and was withal sorrowful that I had not slept sounder and seen more. But before I had gone a furlong faintness seized me, so that I might not go a foot further for want of sleep; and I sat softly down and said my Belief, and as I babbled on my beads they sent me to sleep.

And then saw I much more than I have told before, for I saw the field full of folk that I before spoke of, and how Reason got him ready to preach to all the realm, and with a cross began his sermon thus before the King :—

He proved that these pestilences were for sin alone, and also the south-west wind on Saturday at evening was plainly for pride alone, and nothing else. Pear-

trees and plum-trees were blown to the earth, for warning, ye men, ye ought to do better. Beeches and broad oaks were blown to the ground, and their roots turned upwards, in token of fear that deadly sin at Doomsday shall destroy them all.

Of this matter I might mumble on full lengthily, but I will say as I saw, so God help me, how plainly Reason preached before the people. He bade Waster go do what he best could, and make good his wasting by some manner of craft. And he prayed Pernel to let be her finery, and keep it in her box for wealth at need. Tom Stowe he told to take two staves, and fetch Felice home from the women's punishment.<sup>1</sup> He warned Wat that his wife was blameworthy, and that her head was worth half a mark and his hood not worth a groat. And he bade Bat cut a bough or two, and beat Beton therewith, unless she would work. And then he charged chapmen to chasten their children, "And let no indulgence spoil them while they are young, nor even for any attack of pestilence please them out of reason. My sire said it to me, and so did my mother, that 'to the dearer child the more teaching is needful.' And Solomon who wrote Wisdom said the same, *Qui parcit virge, odit filium*. The English of this Latin—if any will

<sup>1</sup> A difficult passage, explained in various ways, but Professor Skeat's opinion is as follows: "I suppose the sentence to mean that Tom Stowe, who had neglected his wife and let her get into bad ways, or who had allowed her to be punished as a scold, had much better fetch her home than leave her exposed to public derision. Such an errand would require a strong arm, and two staves would be very useful in dispersing the crowd."

know it—is, ‘Whoso spareth the rod spoileth his children.’ ”

And then he besought both prelates and priests, “What ye preach to the people prove it on yourselves, and do it in deeds; it shall bring good to you; for if ye live as ye teach us we shall believe you the better.”

And then he counselled the religious Orders to keep their rule, “Lest the King and his council lessen your allowance, and become stewards of your houses till ye be ordered better.”<sup>1</sup> And then he counselled the King to love the Commons. “They are thy treasure, if treason should be; and thy remedy in need.” And afterwards he prayed the Pope to have pity on Holy Church, and ere he give any grace let him first govern himself. “And ye that have laws to guard let Truth be what ye covet more than gold or other gifts, if ye will please God; for whoso is contrary to Truth He telleth us in the Gospel that God doth not know him, nor any saint in Heaven. *Amen dico vobis, nescio vos.*<sup>2</sup> And ye that seek St. James, and the saints of Rome, seek St. Truth, for he can save you all; *Qui cum patre et filio*<sup>3</sup> that it may fair befall them that follow my sermon.” And thus said Reason.

Then came Repentance and repeated Reason’s theme, and made Will<sup>4</sup> weep water with his eyes.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 143, for passage in C-Text.

<sup>2</sup> Verily I say to you, I know you not.

<sup>3</sup> Who with the Father and the Son, etc.

<sup>4</sup> This may refer to the author; but, more likely, the term “Will” is used, as in Bunyan’s “Lord Will-be-will,” for the *will* in the sense of the whole emotional and passionate nature.

*Superbia* (Pride).

Pernel Proud-heart threw herself to the earth, and lay long ere she looked up, and cried, "Lord, mercy!" and vowed to Him who made us all that she would unsew her shift and put upon her a hair shirt, to tame her flesh, that was fierce to sin. "High heart shall never seize me, but I will hold me low and suffer myself to be spoken ill of; and thus have I never done before. But now I will be meek and beseech pardon, for all this I have hated in my heart."<sup>1</sup>

*Luxuria* (Lechery).

Then Lecher said "Alas!" and he cried on our Lady for mercy between God and his soul because of his misdeeds,—if that he should drink but with the duck, and dine but once on Saturdays for seven years after.

*Invidia* (Envy).

Envy with heavy heart asked for shrift, and sorrowfully he began to say *mea culpa*.<sup>2</sup> He was as pale as a pellet,<sup>3</sup> and seemed to be palsied, and he was clothed in a caurimawry,<sup>4</sup> which I could not describe. He was in kirtle<sup>5</sup> and kourteby<sup>6</sup> and a knife by his side, the upper sleeves were of a friar's

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 145, for passage in C-Text.

<sup>2</sup> My sin—*i.e.*, "I have sinned"—a phrase taken from the form of confession. The C-Text adds here, "His clothes were of cursing and sharp words."

<sup>3</sup> A pellet or ball used as a war-missile, generally of stone.

<sup>4</sup> The name of some coarse, rough material.

<sup>5</sup> A kind of under-jacket.

<sup>6</sup> A short coat or cloak.

frock. And like a leek which had lain long in the sun, so he looked, with his hollow cheeks and evil scowl. His body was all swollen up for anger, so that he bit his lips, and he went along clenching his fist, and thought to avenge himself in deeds or in words when he saw his time. Every word he threw out was from an adder's tongue: he lived by finding fault and making accusation, together with back-biting and slander and bearing false witness; this was all his courtesy wherever he showed himself.

"I would be shriven," quoth this shrew, "if for shame I durst: by God, I would be gladder for Gib to have ill-luck than if I had this week won a wey<sup>1</sup> of Essex cheese. I have a neighbour nigh me, I have often vexed him, and lied about him to lords to make him lose his silver, and I have made his friends his foes through my false tongue. His favour and his good fortune full sorely grieve me.

"Between house and house I often make strife, so that both life and limb are lost through my words. And when I meet in the market him I most hate, I hail him graciously as if I were his friend, for he is stronger than I; I dare do no other. But had I mastery and might,—God wot my will!

"And when I come to the church, and should kneel to the Rood, and pray for the people as the priest teacheth, for pilgrims and palmers, and afterwards for all people, then I ask on my knees that Christ give them sorrow that bore away my bowl and my tattered sheet. I turn my eyes away from

<sup>1</sup> *Wey* = a certain weight, here 3 cwt.

the altar and see how Ellen has a new coat, and I wish then it were mine, and all the web it came from. And I laugh at men's loss, for it pleaseth my heart, and I weep at their gain and bewail the while, and deem that they do ill where I do full worse; and whoso reproveth me for it I bear him deadly hate afterwards. I would that every man were my servant, for if any hath more than I it sorely vexeth me. And thus I live loveless like an evil dog, so that all my body swelleth for the bitterness of my gall.<sup>1</sup> I have not eaten as a man ought for many years, for envy and evil will are hard to digest. Can no sugar, nor sweet thing assuage my swelling? Nor no *diapenidion*<sup>2</sup> drive it from my heart, nor neither shrift nor shame, except one scrape my maw?"

"Yes, readily," said Repentance, and counselled him for the best, "Sorrow for sins is salvation of souls."

"I am sorry," quoth the man, "I am but seldom otherwise, and that maketh me thus thin because I cannot avenge me. Among burgesses in London have I been dwelling, and bade Backbiting be a broker to blame men's wares. When one sold and I not, then was I ready to lie and scowl on my neighbour and to find fault with his goods. I will amend this, if I may, through the might of God Almighty."

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 146, for C-Text passage.

<sup>2</sup> An emollient, or expectorant. Professor Skeats remarks on the passage: "A forcible way of expressing the question, 'Can none but the most violent measures relieve my moral sickness?'"

*Ira (Anger).*

Now awaketh Wrath, with two white eyes, and snivelling with his nose, and hanging his head.<sup>1</sup> "I am Wrath," said he, "I was sometime a friar and the convent's gardener for grafting shoots. On limiters<sup>2</sup> and lectors<sup>3</sup> I grafted lies, till they bore leaves of lowly speech to please lords, and then they blossomed abroad into the lady's bower to hear confession, and now is fallen a fruit thereof,—that folk would sooner make confession to them than confess to their own parsons. And now the parsons have perceived that friars share the profits with them, and these *possessioners*<sup>4</sup> preach and defame the friars, and the friars find them in fault, as folk bear witness, and say that when they preach to the people in many a place around, I, Wrath, walk with them and teach them from my books. Thus they both speak of spiritual power, so that either despiseth the other, till they become beggars and live by the spiritual power that I give them; or else they are all rich and ride about. I, Wrath, never rest that I must not follow this wicked folk, for such is my grace. I have an aunt both nun and abbess; she would sooner swoon or die than suffer any pain. I have been cook in her kitchen and served the con-

<sup>1</sup> C-Text has "biting his lips."

<sup>2</sup> Members of a convent licensed to beg within a certain limited district.

<sup>3</sup> One of the orders of clergy.

<sup>4</sup> *Possessioner* = an endowed ecclesiastic (N. E. D.), one of the beneficed clergy.



vent many months, with them, and also with the monks. I was pottage maker for the prioress and other poor ladies, and made them pottage from the idle talk that Dame Joanna was a bastard, and Dame Clarice was a knight's daughter, but her father was a cuckold, and Dame Pernel a priest's wench, who will never be prioress. I, Wrath, dressed their herbs with wicked words, till 'Thou liest,' and 'Thou liest,' leaped out at once, and either hit the other on the cheek; by Christ, had they had knives each had killed the other! Saint Gregory was a good Pope, and had good forethought when he ordained that no prioress should be priest.<sup>1</sup> For they then had been *infamis*<sup>2</sup> the first day, so ill can they keep counsel.

"Among monks I might go, but I shun them many a time, because there are many cruel men to spy out my doings, both prior and sub-prior and our *pater abbas*; and if I tell any tales they consult together and make me fast on Fridays on bread and water, and I am charged in the chapter-house as if I were a child, and beaten on the bare back, without a breach between. So I have no liking to dwell with those men. I eat meagre fish there, and drink weak ale; but at other times when wine cometh, when I drink at evening, I have a foul mouth full five days

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to the practice of certain abbesses who took upon themselves to hear confession of their nuns, as well as "to exercise some other smaller parts of the clerical function."

<sup>2</sup> Infamous; here refers to the violation of the oath of secrecy in confession.

afterwards. All the wickedness that I know about any of our brethren I proclaim in our cloister, so that all the convent know it."

"Now repent thee," said Repentance, "and do thou never repeat counsel that thou knowest, by favour nor by right; nor drink over-delicate drinks, nor too deep neither, lest thy will, because of it, should turn to wrath. '*Esto sobrius*,'<sup>1</sup> he said, and then absolved me, and bade me wish to weep to amend my wickedness."

*Avaricia* (Covetousness).

And then came Covetousness; I cannot describe him, so hungry and hollow Sir Harvey looked. He was beetle-browed and also thick-lipped, with two bleared eyes like a blind hag, and as a leathern purse his cheeks lolled about even lower than his chin, and they trembled for eld.<sup>2</sup> And his beard was beslobbered with bacon, like a bondman's. A hood was on his head above a lousy hat, and he was in a tawny coat twelve winters old and full of vermin, and all dirty and torn to rags, and full of creeping lice; except a louse were a good leaper she could not have walked on that cloth, it was so threadbare.

"I have been covetous," said this caitiff, "I here acknowledge it. For some time I served Sim at the Stile, and was bound his prentice to look after his profit.

"First I learned to lie a leaf or two, to weigh

<sup>1</sup> Be sober.

<sup>2</sup> Old age.

falsely was my first lesson. I went to the fair at Weyhill and Winchester, as my master bade me, with many kinds of merchandise; had not the grace of Guile gone with my wares, they had been unsold these seven years, so God help me!

“Then I went among drapers to learn my primer, and to draw the selvage along, the longer it seemed. Among the rich striped cloths I did a lesson, and sewed them with a pack needle, and fastened them together, and put them in a press and pinned them therein, till ten or twelve yards were stretched out to thirteen.

“My wife was a weaver and made woollen cloth; she told the spinners to spin it out; but the pound that she paid them by weighed a quarter more than my own balance, if any weighed true.

“I bought her barley malt and she brewed it to sell. Penny ale<sup>1</sup> and pudding ale<sup>2</sup> she poured together for labourers and poor folk; that was kept by itself. The best ale was kept in my room or in my bedchamber, and whoso tasted of it bought it afterwards, a gallon for a groat, no less, God wot; and yet it came in cupfuls,<sup>3</sup> my wife did this trick. Rose the Retailer was her rightful name; she hath been at huckstering all her lifetime. But I swear now, as I thrive, that I will stop that sin, and never weigh falsely nor use bad merchandise, but go to

<sup>1</sup> Common or thin ale.

<sup>2</sup> Probably called so because it was thick, like pudding.

<sup>3</sup> Or, by cups at a time. Measuring it in small quantities made it easier to defraud the buyer.

Walsingham with my wife, and pray the Rood of Bromholm<sup>1</sup> to bring me out of debt."

"Didst thou ever repent, or make restitution?" said Repentance.

"Yes," quoth he. "Once I was lodged with a crowd of chapmen, and I rose when they were at rest and rifled their bags."

"That was no restitution," said Repentance, "but a robber's theft; thou hadst been more worthy of hanging for that than for all else that thou hast here showed."

"I weened that rifling was restitution," quoth he, "for I never learned to read in books, and I know no French, in faith, but of the farthest end of Norfolk."

"Usury didst thou ever use in all thy life?" said Repentance.

"Nay, truly," he said, "save in my youth. I learned a lesson amongst Lombards and Jews, how to weigh pence with a weight, and pare down the heaviest, and to lend it<sup>2</sup> for love of the Cross<sup>3</sup> that a pledge might be laid and lost,<sup>4</sup> and such things I wrote down lest he broke his day. I have more manors through arrears than through *miseretur et comodat*.<sup>5</sup>

"I have lent lords and ladies my merchandise, and been their broker afterward and bought it myself;

<sup>1</sup> The cross of Bromholm in Norfolk.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, the light coin.

<sup>3</sup> *Cross*, here = the cross on the back of old coins.

<sup>4</sup> By the borrower.

<sup>5</sup> He is merciful and lends—a phrase from Psa. cxii. 5.

exchanges and chevesances,<sup>1</sup> I deal in such wares, and lend to folk that lose a part of every noble; and with Lombards' letters I took gold to Rome; and I received it here by tally, and there counted out less to them."

"Didst thou ever lend to lords that they might abet thy misdoing?"

"Yea, I have lent to lords who loved me never after, and have made many a knight both mercer and draper, that never paid for his prenticehood a pair of gloves."<sup>2</sup>

"Hast thou pity on poor men who must needs borrow?"<sup>3</sup>

"I have as much pity on poor men as a pedlar hath on cats, who would kill them for greed of their skins if he could catch them."

"Art thou open-handed with thy meat and drink amongst thy neighbours?"

"I am held," he said, "as courteous as a cur in the kitchen, and among my neighbours in special I have such a name."

"Now except thou soon repent, may God never give thee grace on earth to bestow thy goods well, nor may thine issue after thee have joy of what thou winnest, nor may thine executors bestow well

<sup>1</sup> Agreements about the loan of money.

<sup>2</sup> Avarice, in his dealings with knights, who came to him for ready money, made them take part of the loan in kind (silk or cloth)—the money-lenders' regular practice—and he now ironically calls his customers mercers and drapers who never paid anything for their apprenticeship.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, buy on credit.

the silver that thou entrusteth to them, and may what was won with wrong be spent by wicked men.<sup>1</sup> For were I a friar of a house where good faith and charity are, I would not clothe us with thy goods nor repair our church, nor have a penny of thine for my pittance, by my soul's health, for the best book in our house, though the leaves were of exceeding bright gold, if I knew indeed thou wert such as thou tellest, or if I could find out that so it was in any wise. *Servus es alterius cum fercula pinguia queris, pane tuo potius vescere, liber eris.*<sup>2</sup>

"Thou art an unkindly creature. I cannot absolve thee till thou make restitution and reckon up with all of them, and until Reason hath enrolled it in Heaven's register that thou hast made it good to every man I may not absolve thee. *Non dimittitur peccatum, donec restituatur ablatum,*<sup>3</sup> etc. For all who have aught of thy goods, so God have my truth, shall be bound at the great Doom to help thee make restitution. And whoso believeth not this for truth let him look in the Psalter, in *Miserere mei deus,*<sup>4</sup> whether I speak truly, *Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti,*<sup>5</sup> etc. Never shall workman in this world thrive with what thou dost win; *Cum sancto sanctus eris,*<sup>6</sup> construe me that in English."

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 147, for passage in C-Text.

<sup>2</sup> Thou art the slave of another when thou seekest dainty dishes, eat rather thine own bread, and thou wilt be free.

<sup>3</sup> Thy sin will not be remitted, until the thing carried off is restored.

<sup>4</sup> Have mercy on me, O Lord.

<sup>5</sup> For behold thou hast delighted in truth.

<sup>6</sup> With the holy thou shalt be holy.

Then that wretch fell into despair, and would have hanged himself had not Repentance the rather heartened him, in this manner :

“Have mercy in mind, and beg for it with thy mouth, for God’s mercy is more than all His other works; *Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius*,<sup>1</sup> etc., and all the wickedness in this world that man could do or think is no more to the mercy of God than a gleet in the sea.<sup>2</sup> *Omnis iniquitas quantum ad misericordiam dei, est quasi sintilla in medio maris*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore keep mercy in thy mind and among thy merchandise, trust to it; for thou hast no good ground whereof to get thee a cake, except it were with thy tongue or else thy two hands; for the goods that thou has got came through nought but falsehood, and as long as thou livest therewith thou payest naught but borrowest. And if ever thou knowest not to what, nor to whom to make restitution, take it to the bishop, and ask him of his grace to bestow it himself as is best for thy soul. For he shall answer for thee at the great Doom, for thee and for many more that man shall give account. Trust to naught else than what he taught you in Lent, and what he lent you of our Lord’s goods to keep you from sin.”

<sup>1</sup> His mercy is over all His works.

<sup>2</sup> C-Text has : “Wicked deeds fare as a spark of fire that fell in mid-Thames and died for a drop of water.”

<sup>3</sup> All iniquity is to the mercy of God as a spark in the midst of the ocean.

*Gula (Gluttony).*

Now Glutton goeth to shrift, and betaketh him churchward to show his sins. But Beton the brewster bade him good-morrow, and with that asked him, Whitherward would he?

"To Holy Church," quoth he, "to hear mass, and afterwards I will be shriven and sin no more."

"I have good ale, gossip," said she: "Glutton, wilt thou try it?"

"Hast thou at all in thy store any hot spices?"

"I have pepper and seeds of pæony," quoth she, "and a pound of garlic, and a farthing's-worth of fennel seed for fasting days."

Then goeth Glutton in and great oaths after him; Cis the shoemaker<sup>1</sup> sat on the bench, Wat the warrener and his wife also, Tim the tinker and twain of his prentices, Hick the hackney man,<sup>2</sup> and Hugh the needle-seller, Clarice of Cock Lane, and the clerk of the church, Daw the Ditcher, and a dozen others; Sir Piers of Pridie and Pernel of Flanders,<sup>3</sup> a fiddle player, a ratter, a sweeper of Cheap,<sup>4</sup> a rope-maker, a riding-man,<sup>5</sup> and Rose the

<sup>1</sup> *Souteresse*, female shoemaker, or seller of shoes.

<sup>2</sup> One who let out horses on hire.

<sup>3</sup> C-Text inserts: "A keeper of cattle, a hermit, the hangman of Tyburn and a dozen rascals—porters, pick-purses, and bald tooth-drawers."

<sup>4</sup> A scavenger of West Cheap, or Cheapside.

<sup>5</sup> *Redynkyng*. Origin and meaning obscure (N. E. D.) The translation above is uncertain, but implies one who holds his land in return for service on horseback.



dish-maker, Godfrey of Garlickhithe and Griffin the Welshman, and many old clothesmen; and early in the morning, with brave cheer, they gave Glutton good ale for fellowship.<sup>1</sup>

Then Clement the cobbler cast off his cloak, and put it for sale at the New Fair;<sup>2</sup> Hick the hackneyman threw down his hood and bade Bat the butcher be on his side. There were chapmen chosen to value these wares; whoso hath the hood should have amends for the cloak. Two rose up quickly and whispered together, and apart by themselves appraised these pennyworths; and they could not

<sup>1</sup> *To hansel* = (*lit.*) for an earnest or pledge.

<sup>2</sup> The *New Fair*. N. E. D., under *Handicap*, gives the following explanation of this game of barter: "A kind of sport having an element of chance in it, in which one person challenges some article belonging to another for which he offered something of his own in exchange. On the challenge being entertained, an umpire was chosen to decree the difference of value between the two articles, and all three parties deposited forfeit money in a cap or hat. The umpire then pronounced his award as to the 'boot,' or odds, to be given with the inferior article, on hearing which the two other parties drew out full or empty hands to denote their acceptance or non-acceptance of the match in terms of the award. If the two were found to agree in holding the match, either 'in' or 'off,' the whole of the money deposited was taken by the umpire; but, if not, by the party who was willing that the match should stand."

(See *Notes and Queries*, June 23, 1853). In *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* (chap. xlv.), there is a challenge between a horse and a watch (see *Sportsman*, April 17, 1897).

Professor W. P. Ker has pointed out a further reference in Lever's *Charles O'Malley* (chap. v.), where a gold breast-pin is put up against a horse.

in their conscience agree aright till Robin the roper<sup>s</sup> arose for the truth, and named himself umpire to settle the bargain between the three, that there should be no debate. Hick the hostler had the cloak, in covenant that Clement should fill the cup, and have Hick the hostler's hood, and hold himself content ; and whoso first repented it should then rise up and pledge Sir Glutton in a gallon of ale. There was laughing and louring, and they cried "Let the cup go round," and so they sat till even-song, and at times they sang, till Glutton had gulped down a gallon and a gill.

He could neither step nor stand until he had his staff, and then he went like a gleeman's dog, sometimes aside, and sometimes behind, as one who layeth nets to catch fowl. And when he drew nigh the door then his eyes grew dim, and he stumbled on the threshold and fell to the ground. Clement the cobbler caught him round the middle to lift him up, and laid him across his knees. But Glutton was a great churl, and hard to lift, and coughed up a "caudel" in Clement's lap, that the hungriest hound in Hertfordshire durst not lap of that offal, so unlovely it smelt. With all the woe in the world his wife and his daughter bear him home to bed and put him therein ; and after all this excess he had a fit of sloth, so that he slept Saturday and Sunday till the sun went down. Then he awoke from his slumber, and the first word he said was, "Where is the bowl?" Then his wife upbraided him for his wicked living, and also Repentance rebuked him thus :

"Thou hast wrought evil in thy life, in words and works, shrive thee therefore and be ashamed thereof, and declare it with thy mouth."

"I, Glutton," said the man, "confess me guilty : that I have trespassed with my tongue I cannot tell how often ; sworn ' God's soul ' and ' So God help me and halidom ' when there was no need, nine hundred times ; and have over-eaten me at supper and sometimes at dinner,<sup>1</sup> so that I, Glutton, threw it up before I had gone a mile, and spilled what might be saved and spent on some hungry one ; I have both eaten and drunken over-delicately on fasting days, and at one time sat so long there that I slept and ate together. For love of idle tales in taverns, and to drink the more, I dined, and hied to the meat before noon on fasting days."

"This open confession," said Repentance, "shall be for merit to thee."

And then Glutton began to weep and make great mourning for his wicked life that he had lived, and vowed to fast ; "Neither for hunger nor thirst shall fish on Friday pass within me till Abstinence, my aunt, hath given me leave ; and yet have I hated her all my life-time."

### *Accidia (Sloth).*

Then came Sloth with two slimy eyes, and all beslobbered. "I must sit," said the fellow, "or else I should nap ; I may not stand nor stoop, nor kneel without a stool. Were I abed no ringing would

<sup>1</sup> *Lit.*, "nones," which at this time were at noon.

make me rise, until I were ready to dine." With a great sigh he heaved forth *benedicite*, and beat his breast, and stretched himself and groaned, and at last he snored.

"What! awake, man!" said Repentance, "and haste thee to shrift."

"If I should die on this day I should not care; I know not my *paternoster* perfectly as the priest singeth it, but I know rimes of Robin Hood and Randolph, Earl of Chester, but neither of our Lord nor our Lady the least rime that ever was made. I have made forty vows and forgotten them in the morning; I never performed penance as the priest bade me, nor was I ever yet right sorry for my sins. And if I pray any prayers, except it be in wrath, what I say with my tongue is two miles from my heart.

"I am occupied every day, holidays and others, with idle tales at the alehouse, and at other times in churches; God's pain and passion I full seldom think on. I never visited sick men nor fettered folk in prison; I would rather hear of harlotry or the cobblers' summer game,<sup>1</sup> or lying tales to laugh at and belie my neighbour, than all that Mark, Matthew, John, and Luke ever wrote. And vigils and fasting days, all these I let pass and lie in bed in Lent and my leman in my arms, till matins and mass be done, and then I go to the friars; if I come to *ite, missa est*,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Summer game*, probably the rural May games, which may have been arranged by the Shoemakers' Guild.

<sup>2</sup> The concluding words of the service of the Mass—"Go; Mass is ended."

I hold myself served. I am not shriven for a long time except sickness force me, not twice in two years, and then upon guess I shrive me.

"I have been priest and parson more than thirty winters, yet I can neither solfa<sup>1</sup> nor sing, nor read saints' lives; but I can find a hare in a field or furrow better than I can interpret plainly one clause in *beatus vir* or *beati omnes*,<sup>2</sup> and tell it to my parishioners. I can hold love-days,<sup>3</sup> and hear a reeve's reckoning, but in the Canon or the Decretals<sup>4</sup> I cannot read a line. If I buy and promise to pay, except it be tallied, I forget it as quickly, and if men ask it of me six or seven times I deny it with oaths; and thus I vex true men ten hundred times. And my servants' salary is a long time behind, grievous is it to hear the reckoning when we have to make up accounts; so with ill-will and wrath I pay my workmen.

"If any man doth me a benefit, or helpeth me in need, I am unkind towards his courtesy, and cannot understand it; for I have, and have had, something of a hawk's way; I am not lured with love, except there lie aught under the thumb. The kindness that my fellow-Christians showed me of yore, sixty times have I, Sloth, forgotten it since.

<sup>1</sup> *Solfa* = to practise singing the scale of notes.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man (Psa. i. or cxii.). Blessed are all (Psa. cxxviii.).

<sup>3</sup> See p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> *Canon*, the canon of the Mass. *Decretals*, a collection of popes' edicts and decrees of councils, forming part of the canon law.

“By speech and by sparing of speech I have wasted many a time both flesh and fish, and many other victuals; both bread and ale, butter, milk, and cheese, I have wasted carelessly in my service, till it could serve no man. I wandered about in youth and gave myself to learn naught, and for my foul sloth have been a beggar ever since; ‘*heu michi, quod sterilem vitam duxi iuvenilem.*’”<sup>1</sup>

“Repentest thou not?” said Repentance, and forthwith he swooned, till *Vigilate*<sup>2</sup> the watcher fetched water from his eyes, and threw it on his face, and cried to him earnestly, and said, “Beware of Despair, who would betray thee. ‘I am sorry for my sins,’ say thus to thyself, and beat thyself on the breast, and pray for His grace, for there is no guilt here so great but His goodness is not greater.”

Then Sloth sat up and straightway crossed himself, and made a vow before God against his foul sloth. “There shall be no Sunday this seven years except sickness hinder it, that I shall not before day betake me to the dear church, and hear Matins and Mass as if I were a monk. No ale after meat shall withhold me thence till I have heard evensong, I vow to the Rood. And moreover I will repay, if I have as much, all that I have gained wickedly, since I had wit. And though my livelihood fail, I will never cease until every man have his own ere I go hence; and with the residue and the remnant, by the Rood of Chester, I will seek Truth first before I see Rome.”

<sup>1</sup> See p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Be vigilant.

Robert the Robber looked on *Reddite*,<sup>1</sup> and for that he had nought wherewith to make restitution he wept full sore. But yet the sinful wretch said to himself, "Christ, that didst die upon the cross on Calvary, when Dismas<sup>2</sup> my brother besought Thy grace, and hadst mercy on that man for sake of *memento*,<sup>3</sup> so have pity on this robber that may not have *reddere*,<sup>4</sup> nor may never hope to earn by handicraft what I owe. But for thy great mercy I beseech compassion; condemn me not at Doomsday for what I did so ill."

What befell this thief I cannot fully show, well I know he wept water fast with both his eyes, and therewith soon after acknowledged his sin to Christ, and vowed that he would polish anew his staff *penitencia*,<sup>5</sup> and go<sup>6</sup> with it on pilgrimage over the land all his life.

And then Repentance had pity and told them all to kneel. "For I will pray our Saviour for grace for all sinful ones, to heal us of our misdeeds, and have mercy on us all. Now, God," said he, "that of Thy goodness hast made the world, and of naught madest aught and man most like Thyself; and then didst suffer him to sin—a sickness for us all, and all

<sup>1</sup> Restore.

<sup>2</sup> The name of the penitent thief as given in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.

<sup>3</sup> 'Remember.' "Domine *memento* me," etc. "Lord, remember me" (Luke xxiii. 42).

<sup>4</sup> (Wherewith) to restore.

<sup>5</sup> Penitence.

<sup>6</sup> *Lit.*, "By help of it leap over the land," etc.

for the best, for I believe whatever the book telleth, *O felix culpa ! O necessarium peccatum Ade*,<sup>1</sup> etc. For through that sin Thy Son was sent to the earth and became man of a maid, to save mankind, and didst make Thyself with Thy Son and us sinful ones alike. *Faciamus hominem ad ymaginem et similitudinem nostram*.<sup>2</sup>

“ *Et alibi : qui manet in caritate, in deo manet, et deus in eo*.<sup>3</sup> And afterwards, with Thy Son Himself, didst die in our garment for man’s sake on Good Friday, at full time of the day, where Thyself nor Thy Son didst feel no sorrow in death, but in our garment was the sorrow, and Thy Son took it, *Captivam duxit captivitatem*.<sup>4</sup> The sun for sorrow thereof lost sight for a time, about midday, the meal-time of saints,<sup>5</sup> when there is most light ; ] thou

1 O blessed sin ! O necessary sin of Adam !

2 Let us make man in our image and our likeness.

3 And elsewhere : Whoso dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

4 He led captivity captive.

5 Professor Skeat comments on this passage : “ This expression seems to be a figurative one, having reference to the time of the crucifixion, when Christ’s blood was shed upon the cross. It has also been suggested that there is reference here to Canticles i. 7. I prefer to take it in connection with the succeeding context, and to suppose that the poet is speaking of the crucifixion, as having been a time of refreshment to our forefathers who sat in darkness ; the force of which reference can only be understood by readers who are familiar with the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. There the quotation from Isa. ix. 2 is explained with reference to the ‘ Harrowing of Hell ’—*i.e.*, the descent of Christ into hell to fetch out the souls of the Patriarchs.”



didst feed our forefathers in darkness with thy fresh blood, *Populus qui ambulabat in tenebris, vidit lucem magnam*;<sup>1</sup> and through the light that went out of Thee Lucifer was blinded, and Thou didst blow<sup>2</sup> all Thy blessed into the bliss of Paradise. The third day after, Thou didst go about in our garment; only sinful Mary saw Thee before St. Mary Thy mother; and all to solace the sinful Thou didst suffer it should be so. *Non veni vocare iustos, set peccatores ad penitentiam*.<sup>3</sup> And Thy bravest deeds, all that Mark, Matthew, John, and Luke have written of, were done in our armour. *Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*.<sup>4</sup> And by so much, meseemeth, we may the more surely pray and beseech Thee, that art our Father and our Brother, if it be Thy will, be merciful to us. And have pity on these sinners that here sorely repent them that ever they angered Thee in this world, in word, thought, or deeds."

Then Hope seized a horn of *Deus, tu conversus vivificabis nos*,<sup>5</sup> and blew it with *Beati quorum remisse sunt iniquitates*,<sup>6</sup> so that all the saints in heaven sang

<sup>1</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

<sup>2</sup> The term "didst blow" is explained by the word "breath" used in a passage in the second part of the poem with regard to the entrance of Christ into hell, "with that breath hell brake open."

<sup>3</sup> I came not to call the just, but sinners to repentance.

<sup>4</sup> The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.

<sup>5</sup> O God, Thou hast converted us and wilt quicken us.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are they whose iniquities are remitted.

at once, *Homines et iumenta saluabis, quemadmodum multiplicasti misericordiam tuam, deus*,<sup>1</sup> etc.

And then a thousand men came thronging together, who cried upward to Christ and His pure Mother for grace to go with them to seek Truth. But there was no wight so wise who knew the way thither, and they wandered blindly over banks and hills like beasts, a long time, till it was late, when they met a man dressed as a Paynim, pilgrim-wise. He bare a staff bound with a broad list, wound about it in the manner of bindweed.<sup>2</sup> A bowl and a bag he bare by his side; a hundred ampulles<sup>3</sup> were placed upon his hat, tokens of Sinai, and shells of Galicia, and many a cross and keys-of-Rome on his cloak, and the vernicle in front so that men should know and see by his tokens whom he had sought.<sup>4</sup>

The people asked him first from whence he came.

<sup>1</sup> Thou wilt save man and beast (even) as thou hast multiplied thy mercy, O God.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, wound round and round it like a creeping plant.

<sup>3</sup> A round, flat vessel holding consecrated oil or water.

<sup>4</sup> Besides the ordinary insignia of pilgrimage, every pilgrim-age had its special *signs*, which "the pilgrim on his return wore conspicuously upon his hat or his scrip, or hanging round his neck, in token that he had accomplished that particular pilgrimage" (quoted from Cutt's *Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages*). Thus the *ampullæ* were the special signs of the Canterbury pilgrimage; the scallop-shell was the sign of the pilgrimage to Compostella (shrine of St. James in Galicia); whilst the signs of the Roman pilgrimage were a badge with the effigies of St. Peter and St. Paul, the cross-keys (keys-of-Rome) and the vernicle. The *vernicle* was a copy of the handkerchief of St. Veronica, which was miraculously impressed with the features of our Lord (*Skeat*).

“From Sinai,” he said, “and from our Lord’s sepulchre; I have been both in Bethlehem and Babylon, in Armenia, in Alexandria, and in many other places. Ye may see by my tokens on my hat that I have walked full far in wet and dry, and have sought good saints for my soul’s health.”

“Knowest thou aught of a saint that men call Truth? Couldst thou at all show us the way to his dwelling?”

“Nay, so God help me,” said the man then, “I never saw palmer with staff or with scrip ask before about him, till now in this place.”

“Peter!” quoth a ploughman, and put forward his head, “I know him as well as clerk doth his books; Conscience and Mother-wit showed me his dwelling and made me promise faithfully to serve him for ever both in sowing and planting, as long as I could labour. I have been his follower all these fifty winters; both sown his seeds and driven his beasts and looked after his profit within and without. I ditch and I delve, I do what Truth biddeth; sometimes I sow and sometimes I thresh; in tailors’ or tinkers’ craft whatever Truth can devise; I weave and I wind and do what Truth biddeth. And though I say it myself, I serve him to his pleasure. I have my full hire from him and sometimes more. He is the readiest payer that poor men know; he withholdeth from no man his hire at eventide. He is lowly as a lamb and kindly of speech, and if ye wish to know where he dwelleth, verily I will show you the way to his place.”

"Yea, dear Piers," said these pilgrims, and proffered him hire to go with them to Truth's dwelling-place.

"Nay, by my soul's health," quoth Piers, and began to swear, "I would not take a farthing for St. Thomas's shrine! Truth would love me the less a long time afterwards. But if ye wish indeed to go, this is the way thither that I shall tell you and set you in the true road.

"Ye must go through Meekness, both men and women, until ye come into Conscience, let Christ know the truth that ye love our Lord God the best of all things; and then next in no wise hurt your neighbour any more than thou wouldest he should thyself.

"And so turn forth by a brook, Be-humble-of-speech, till ye find a ford, Honour-your-fathers, *Honora patrem et matrem*,<sup>1</sup> etc. Wade in that water, and wash you well there, and ye shall all your lifetime go the more easily. And then thou shalt see Swear-not-at-all-except-~~it-be-of-need-and-in-special-not-idly-by-the-name-of-God-Almighty~~. Then shalt thou come by a croft, but go thou not therein; that croft is called Covet-not-men's-goods-nor-their-wives-not-any-of-their-servants-to-vex-them. See that ye break no boughs there except they be your own. Two stocks stand there, they are called Steal-not and Slay-not, but tarry not, strike forth past both and leave them on thy left hand and look not thereafter; and hold well thy high holiday till even.

"Then shalt thou turn from a hill, Bear-no-false-

<sup>1</sup> Honour father and mother, etc.

witness ; it is hedged in with florins and many other fees : look thou pluck no plant there, for peril of thy soul.

“ Then shalt thou see Say-truth-as-it-is-to-be-done-in-no-other-manner-else-for-any-man’s-bidding.

“ Then shalt thou come to a court as bright as the sun ; the moat about the manor is of Mercy, and all the walls are of Wit to keep Will out ; and embattled with Christendom to save mankind, buttressed with Believe-so-or-thou-shalt-not-be-saved. And all the houses, the halls and the chambers, are covered not with lead, but with Love and Lowly-speech-as-brethren.

“ The bridge is of Pray-well-and-the-better-mayst-thou-speed ; each pillar is of Penance of prayers to saints ; of alms-deeds are the hinges that the gates hang upon. The porter is called Grace, a good man forsooth ; his man is called Amend-you for many a man knoweth him ; say to him this sign that Truth may know the truth, ‘ I performed the penance the priest enjoined me and am full sorry for my sins, and so I shall ever be when I think thereon, though I were a pope.’

“ Pray Amend-you then to humble himself to his master, to draw back the wicket that the woman shut, when Adam and Eve ate unroasted apples. *Per Evam cunctis clausa est, et per Mariam virginem iterum patefacta est ;*<sup>1</sup> for he hath the key and the latch, though the King may sleep.

<sup>1</sup> By Eve it was shut to all, and by Mary the Virgin it was opened again.

“And if Grace grant thee to go in in this wise thou shalt see Truth dwelling in thy heart in a chain of charity, even as if thou wert a child to suffer him and say naught against thy Father’s will. But then beware of Wrath, who is a wicked shrew; he hath envy towards Him who dwelleth in thy heart; and thrusteth forth Pride, for praise of thyself. The boldness of thy good deeds then maketh thee blind, and then wilt thou be driven out as dew, and the door closed, and keyed and latched to keep thee without; haply a hundred winters ere thou enter again. Thus thou mightest lose his love for setting much by thyself, and haply never enter again, except thou have grace.

“But there are seven sisters that serve Truth ever, and they are porters of the posterns, and belong to the place. One is called Abstinence, and another Humility, Charity and Chastity are his chief hand-maids, Patience and Peace help much people, Largess the lady hath let in full many. She hath helped a thousand out of the devil’s pinfold. And whoso is akin to these seven, so God help me, he is wondrously welcome and received kindly. And except ye be akin to some of these seven, it is full hard, by my head,” said Piers, “for any of you all to get entrance at any gate there, save grace be the greater.”

“Now, by Christ,” quoth a cutpurse, “I have no kin there.”

“Nor I,” quoth an ape-keeper, “for aught that I know!”

“God save us,” quoth a wafer-seller, “knew I this

for truth, I would never go a foot further for any friar's preaching."

"Yes, verily," said Piers the Plowman, and egged them all on to goodness, "Mercy is a maiden there who hath power over them all; and she is akin to all the sinful, and her Son also; and through the help of those two (hope thou none other), thou mightest find favour there, if thou go betimes."

"By St. Paul," said a pardoner, "peradventure I be not known there; I will go fetch my box with my brevets, and a bull with bishop's letters!"

"By Christ," said a low woman, "I will follow thy company; thou shalt say I am thy sister; I know not where they may come to!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The C-Text adds here: "Yea, *villam emi* [I have bought a farm]," said one, "and now I must thither to see how it pleaseth me," and took his leave of Piers. Another right anon said, he "must needs follow five yoke [of oxen], therefore it behoveth me to go with a good will and quickly drive them. Therefore, I pray you, Piers, peradventure if ye meet Truth, ask that I may be excused." Then there was one called Active, he seemed a husband. "I have wedded a wife," he said, "of right wanton ways; were I a se'nnight from her she would sin, and lour on me, and chide me lightly, and say I love another. Therefore, Piers Plowman, I pray thee say to Truth I may not come, for a Kit she clingeth to me so." . . . Said Contemplation, "Though I suffer sorrow, famine, and want, I will follow Piers."

## PASSUS VI.

*Piers the Plowman is to go with the pilgrims to find Truth, but has first to plough a piece of land—He gives them all good advice and makes his will—He sets the pilgrims to work—Many are idle, but Hunger subdues them—Hunger then counsels Piers, and refuses to go away—The people have to feed him.*

“THIS way were hard to find except we had a guide who would go with us every step.” Thus this folk complained.

Said Perkin the Plowman, “By St. Peter of Rome, I have a half-acre to plough by the highway, if I had ploughed and planted this half-acre I would go with you and show you the way.”

“That would be a long tarrying,” said a lady in a veil. “What should we women work at meanwhile?”

“Some shall sew the sack,” said Piers, “to keep the wheat from spilling; and, ye lovely ladies, with your long fingers, who have silk and sendal to sew, make, while ye have time, chasubles for chaplains, to honour churches. Wives and widows, spin wool and flax, make cloth, I counsel you, and so teach your daughters. Take heed how the needy and the naked



lie, and devise clothes for them, for so Truth commandeth. For I will give them livelihood unless the land fail, flesh and bread both for rich and poor as long as I live, for the Lord of Heaven's love. And all manner of men who live by meat and drink, help them to work actively that win your food."

"By Christ," then said a knight, "he teacheth us the best, but about that matter, truly, I was never taught. But teach me," quoth the knight, "and, by Christ, I will try!"

"By St. Paul," said Perkin, "ye proffer yourself so fairly that I will swink and sweat and sow for us both, and do other labours for thy love all my lifetime, in covenant that thou keep Holy Church and myself from wasters and from wicked men who spoil this world. And go hunt boldly for hares and foxes and boars and badgers that break down my hedges, and go tame the falcons to kill wild fowl; for they come to my croft and crop my wheat."

Then the knight said courteously, "I pledge my faith, Piers, to fulfil this covenant after my power, though I should fight for it; as long as I live I will uphold thee."

"Yea, and yet one more point I pray you," said Piers. "See that ye vex no tenant, except Truth will assent. And though ye may amerce them, let Mercy be the taxer, and Meekness thy master in spite of Meed's checks; and though poor men proffer you presents and gifts, take it not lest ye may not deserve it; for thou shalt pay for it again at a year's end, in a full perilous place called Purgatory. And

if thou ill-use not thy bondmen thou mayst speed the better ; though he be here thine underling, in heaven it may well hap that he be set higher and in greater bliss than thou, except thou do better and live as thou shouldst ; *Amice, ascende superius*.<sup>1</sup> For in the charnel-house at the church it is hard to know churls, or a knight from a knave ; know this in thy heart. And see that thou be true of tongue and that thou dost hate tales, except they be of wisdom or wit, to chasten thy workmen. Hold with no ribalds nor listen to their lies, and specially at meals eschew such men ; for they are the Devil's story-tellers, I bid thee understand."

"I assent, by St. James," said the knight then. "I will do according to thy words while my life lasteth."

"And I will apparel me," said Perkin, "in a pilgrim's guise, and I will go with you till we find Truth ; and I will put on me my clothes which are patched and full of holes, my leggings,<sup>2</sup> and my cuffs against the cold in my nails, and hang my seed-basket at my neck instead of a scrip, and put therein a bushel of bread-corn ; for I will myself sow it, and then I will go on a pilgrimage to get pardon, as palmers do. But whoso now will help me to ear or to sow before I set out, by our Lord he shall have

<sup>1</sup> Friend, go up higher.

<sup>2</sup> *Cockers* (orig.), "a casing for the leg ; applied at various times to a kind of legging, a highlaced boot, or a combination of boot and legging, worn by husbandmen, hunters, fishers, etc., to protect the legs. The word is still used in the North for gaiters or leggings, and even for coarse stockings without feet, used as gaiters (called in Scotland *loags*)" (N. E. D.).

leave to glean here in harvest time, and make merry therewith in spite of any who may grudge it. And every kind of craftsman who can live honestly and faithfully I will find them food; but not Jack the juggler and Janet of the stews, and Daniel the dice-player and Denot the bawd, nor the lying friar and the folk of his order, nor Robin the ribald, because of his foul words. Truth once told me and bade me repeat it, *Deleantur de libro viventium*.<sup>1</sup> I must not deal with them; for Holy Church is commanded to take no tithe of them, *Quia cum iustis non scribantur*;<sup>2</sup> by good luck they have escaped, now God amend them!"

Piers's wife is called Dame Work-while-time-is, and his daughter Do-right-thus-or-thy-mother-will-beat-thee; his son is named Suffer-thy-sovereigns-to-have-their-will-judge-them-not-for-if-thou-dost-thou-shalt-dearly-abye-it.

"May God be with all," said Piers, "for thus His word teacheth us."<sup>3</sup>

"For now I am old and hoary and have goods of my own, I will go with the others in penance and pilgrimage, and therefore, ere I go, I will write my bequest.

<sup>1</sup> Let them be blotted out from the book of the living.

<sup>2</sup> Because they are not written with the just.

<sup>3</sup> C-Text inserts, amongst others, the following lines: "That which lords, such as mayors and senators, command us, as from the King, oppose it never; all that they command, I bid thee verily that thou suffer it; work thou after their warning and words, but after their doing do thou not, my dear son," quoth Piers.

"*In dei nomine, amen*,<sup>1</sup> I will make it myself. He shall have my soul who hath best deserved it, and will defend it from the devil, as I believe, till I come to His account, as my *Credo* telleth me, to have release and remission on that rental,<sup>2</sup> I hope. The Church shall have my body and keep my bones, for he<sup>3</sup> asked the tithe on my corn and my goods. I readily paid it lest my soul should be in peril, therefore he is bound, I hope, to put me in his Mass and mention me among all Christians in the Commemoration.<sup>4</sup>

"My wife shall have what I earned honestly and no more, and share it with my daughters and my dear children. And though I should die to-day my debts are all paid; I took home what I had borrowed before I went to bed. And with the residue and the remnant, by the Rood of Lucca, I will honour Truth therewith, as I live, and be his pilgrim at the plough for poor men's sake. My plough-foot shall be my pike-staff and pick the roots apart,<sup>5</sup> and help my coulter to cut and clean the furrows."

<sup>1</sup> In the name of God, amen.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, a release from the dues recorded in the rental, or account of the rents of an estate.

<sup>3</sup> *He*—*i.e.*, the parish priest, representing the Church.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the prayer for the dead which occurs in the Canon of the Mass, the most solemn portion of the Office where the consecration of the elements takes place.

<sup>5</sup> The pike-staff means the pilgrim's spiked staff. N. E. D., under *plough-foot* = "In a wheelless plough an adjustable piece of iron or wood attached to the front of the beam, regulating the depth of the ploughing. It is doubtful if *plough-foot* in *Piers Plowman* has this meaning; the variant reading is

Now Perkin and his pilgrims have gone to plough, and many helped him to ear this half-acre. Ditchers and delvers digged up the balks, and Perkin was pleased therewith, and praised them much. Other workmen there were that worked full eagerly, each man in his own way made himself busy, and some, to please Perkin, digged up the weeds. At high prime<sup>1</sup> Piers let the plough stand, that he might look after them himself; and whosoever worked best he should be hired afterwards when harvest-time came.

And then some were sitting and singing at the ale, and helping to ear his half-acre with "How! trollilolli!"

"Now by peril of my soul," said Piers, in pure anger, "except ye arise quickly and hasten to work, no grain that groweth shall gladden you in your need, and though ye die for grief, the devil have him that recketh it!"

Then were the lazy rogues afraid, and feigned to be blind; some twisted<sup>2</sup> their legs as such rascals can, and made their moan to Piers and prayed mercy of him. "For we have no limbs to labour with, Lord, thanked be ye; but we pray for you,

*plough-bat*, and the context points to its identity with *plough-staff* = a staff ending in a small spade or shovel used by the ploughman to clear the coulter and mould-board from earth, roots, weeds, etc."

<sup>1</sup> Nine o'clock a.m.

<sup>2</sup> The original word is *aliri* = across (?) or perhaps "loosely stretched out." The men were shamming lameness.

Piers, and also for your plough, that of His grace God may multiply your grain, and repay you for your alms that ye give us here, for we may not swink nor sweat, such sickness aileth us."

"If what ye say be true," said Piers, "I shall soon find it out! Ye are wasters, I wot well, and Truth knoweth the truth! And I am his old servant, and am bidden warn him who they are in the world who have harmed his workmen. Ye waste what men win by travail and trouble, but Truth shall teach you to drive his team ere ye shall eat even barley-bread and drink of the brook. But if one be blind or broken-legged or fettered with irons, he shall eat wheat-bread and drink with me, till God in His goodness send him a remedy.

"But ye could work as Truth would, and get meat and hire for keeping cows in the field and the corn from the beasts; ye could ditch or delve or thresh the sheaves, or help to make mortar, or bear muck a-field. In lechery and lying and sloth ye live, and it is all through long-suffering that vengeance doth not overtake you. But anchorites and hermits, who only eat at dinner-time, and no more till the morrow, they shall have my alms, and my goods shall clothe those who have cloisters and churches. But Robert Runabout shall have nought of mine, nor shall any apostles,<sup>1</sup> except they can preach and have power from the bishop; these may have bread and pottage and be at ease, for it is without reason that an Order hath naught to depend upon."

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, preachers.

Then a waster grew angry and would have fought, and proffered his glove to Piers the Plowman. A Britoner,<sup>1</sup> a braggart, thus also defied Piers:—

“Wilt thou or wilt thou not, we will have our will; we will take thy flour and thy flesh when we like, and make us merry therewith, in spite of thy cheeks!”

Then Piers the Plowman complained to the knight, to defend him, as their covenant was, from cursed shrews, and from these wolfish wasters, that harm the world. “For they waste and earn naught, and while that is there never shall be plenty among the people, as long as my plough standeth idle.”

Then the knight courteously, as his nature was, warned Waster, and taught him better, “Or else, by mine Order, thou shalt abyee it after the law!”

“I was not wont to work,” quoth Waster, “and I will not now begin!” And he held Piers and his plough but worth a pea, and threatened Piers and his men if they met again soon.

“Now by peril of my soul!” said Piers, “I will punish you all!” And he shouted after Hunger, who heard him at once. “Avenge me of these wasters, who shame the world,” he said.

Then hastily Hunger seized Waster by the maw, and wrung him so that both his eyes watered; he buffeted the Britoner about the cheeks so that he looked like a lantern all his life afterwards. He

<sup>1</sup> N. E. D., under *Britoner*, quotes Professor Skeat's note: “An inhabitant of Brittany, a Frenchman; here a term of reproach.”

beat them both so that he nigh broke their ribs; and had not Piers with a peas-loaf prayed Hunger to cease, they had both been buried—deem thou naught else.

“Suffer them to live,” he said, “and let them eat with hogs, or beans and bran baked together, or else milk and weak ale.” Thus Piers prayed for them.

Lazy rogues, for fear thereof, flew into barns, and flapped on with flails from morning till even, so that Hunger was not so bold to look upon them.

For a potful of peas that Piers had got a crowd of hermits seized their spades, and cut up their cloaks and made short coats of them, and went as workmen with spades and shovels, and digged and ditched to drive Hunger away.

The blind and bedridden were bettered by the thousand, and those who sat begging silver were soon healed. For what was baked for a horse was good for many hungry men, and many a beggar was willing to work for beans, and every poor man was well pleased to have peas for his hire, and what Piers asked them they did as quickly as a sparrowhawk. And Piers was proud thereof, and put them to work,<sup>1</sup> and gave them meat as he could afford, and a reasonable hire.

Then Piers had pity, and prayed Hunger to go home to his own land and keep himself there. “For I am now well avenged of wasters through thy might. But I pray thee before thou goest,” said

<sup>1</sup> C-Text adds: “At plastering, digging, bearing dung a-field, threshing, thatching, whittling of pegs.”



Piers to Hunger, "what is best to do with beggars and bidders? For I know well they will work full ill when thou art gone; for misfortune has made it that they now are so meek, and only for want of their food is this folk at my will.<sup>1</sup>

"They are my brethren by blood, for God bought us all," said Piers. "Truth once taught me to love every one of them, and to help them always in all things when they need it, and I would now learn of thee what were best to do, how I could master them and make them work."

Then said Hunger, "Hear now, and hold it for wisdom: Big and bold beggars that can labour for their bread do thou keep up their hearts with dogs' bread and horse bread; to bring down their bellies, stop their hunger with beans, and if the men grumble, bid them go work,<sup>2</sup> and they shall sup the sweeter when they have deserved it.

"And if thou find any one that fortune or any false men have injured, try to know such and comfort them with thy goods for Christ of Heaven's love. Love them and lend to them as God's law teacheth: *Alter alterius onera portate*.<sup>3</sup> And all men thou canst espy that are needy and have naught, help them with thy goods, love them and blame them not, let God take vengeance; though they do

<sup>1</sup> C-Text adds: "It is naught for love they thus labour steadfastly, but for fear of famine, in faith," said Piers. "There is no pure love with this folk, for all their fair speech."

<sup>2</sup> The pronoun in the original changes here to singular.

<sup>3</sup> Let each bear the burdens of the other.

evil, let God be: *Michi vindicta, et ego retribuam*.<sup>1</sup> And if thou wilt be pleasing to God, do as the gospel teacheth, and make thyself beloved amongst lowly men; so shalt thou find grace. *Facite vobis amicos de mamona iniquitatis*."<sup>2</sup>

"I would not grieve God," said Piers, "for all the goods on earth; might I do as thou sayest and be sinless?"

— "Yea; I promise thee," said Hunger, "or else the Bible lieth. Go to Genesis the Giant, the beginning of us all. '*In sudore*<sup>3</sup> and toil thou shalt earn thy meat, and labour for thy livelihood,' and thus our Lord bade. And Wisdom saith the same, I saw it in the Bible, '*Piger pro frigore*<sup>4</sup> would till no field, and therefore he shall beg and pray and no man abate his hunger.' Matthew with a man's face<sup>5</sup> said these words, that *servus nequam*<sup>6</sup> had a talent, and because he would not trade with it he had his master's ill-will ever after. And for he would not work his lord took from him his talent, and gave that talent to him that had ten talents, and then, so that Holy Church might hear it, he said, 'He that hath shall have, and be helped when he needeth, and he that hath not, shall have naught, and no

<sup>1</sup> Vengeance is mine, and I will repay.

<sup>2</sup> Make to you friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.

<sup>3</sup> In sweat.

<sup>4</sup> The sluggard for the cold.

<sup>5</sup> This alludes to the symbolic representation of the four Evangelists: Matthew, as a man; Mark, a lion; Luke, a bull; John, an eagle.

<sup>6</sup> A wicked servant.

man shall help him; and what he well weeneth he hath I will bereave him of it.'

"Mother-wit would that every man should work either in ditching or digging or travailling in prayers; Christ would that men should work in contemplative life or active life. The Psalter saith in the Psalm of *beati omnes*, the man that feedeth himself by his faithful labour, he is blessed by the Book in body and soul. *Labores manuum tuarum*,"<sup>1</sup> etc.

"Yet I pray you," quoth Piers, "*par charite*<sup>2</sup> if ye know any line<sup>3</sup> of leechcraft, teach it me, my lord. For some of my servants, and myself also, work not for a whole week our belly acheth so."

"I wot well what sickness aileth you," said Hunger, "ye have eaten over much and that maketh you groan. But I bid thee, as thou dost wish thy health, that no day thou shouldest drink ere thou dinest somewhat. Eat naught, I command thee, until Hunger take thee and send his sauce to savour thy lips; and keep some till supper-time, and sit not too long, but rise up ere Appetite have eaten his fill. Let not Sir Surfeit sit at thy board; believe him not, for he is lecherous and dainty of tongue, and his maw is ravenous after many meats."<sup>4</sup> {And if thou

<sup>1</sup> The labours of thy hands.

<sup>2</sup> For love.

<sup>3</sup> *Lit.*, "leaf."

<sup>4</sup> In the C-Text the following lines, amongst others, are inserted here: "Remember Dives and Lazarus, and if thou hast the power, Piers, I counsel thee share thy bread, thy pottage, or thy relish, with all who beg at thy gate for food for God's love. Give them some of thy loaf though thou thyself chew the less. And though liars and thieves and idlers may

diet thee thus I dare lay mine ears that Physic shall sell for food his furred hoods and his cloak of Calabria<sup>1</sup> with all the knobs of gold, and be glad, by my faith, to leave his physic and learn to labour on the land, for livelihood is sweet. For many leeches are murderers—Lord, amend them!—they make men die through their drinks ere Destiny hath willed it.”

“By Saint Paul, these are profitable words,” quoth Piers. “Go now, Hunger, when thou wilt, may it ever be well with thee—for this is a fine lesson, the Lord repay it thee!”

“I vow to God,” said Hunger, “hence I will not go till I have both dined and drunk this day.”

“I have no penny,” said Piers, “to buy pullets, neither geese, nor pigs, but I have two green cheeses, a few curds and cream, and an oat-cake, and two loaves of beans and bran baked for my children. And yet I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon nor no eggs,<sup>2</sup> forsooth, to make collops, but I have parsley and leeks and many cabbages,<sup>3</sup> and eke a

knock, let them bide till the board be removed, but bear no crumbs to them till all thy needy neighbours have made their meal.”

<sup>1</sup> A cloak trimmed with Calabrian fur.

<sup>2</sup> *Kokeney*: an egg; the egg of the common fowl, hen's eggs; or perhaps one of the small or misshapen eggs occasionally laid by fowls, still popularly called in some parts “cock's eggs,” in German *hahneneier*. The same word as “cockney”—i.e., egg of cocks (N. E. D.). Collops were made of eggs and bacon.

<sup>3</sup> *Lit.*, cole-plant—any sort of cabbage.

cow and a calf and a cart-mare to draw my dung a-field while the drought lasteth. And by this provision we must live till Lammastide; and by that I hope to have harvest in my croft, and then may I get thy dinner, as it pleaseth me well."

All the poor people then fetched peascods, and brought in their laps beans and baked apples, onions and chervils and many ripe cherries, and proffered this present to Piers, wherewith to please Hunger.

Hunger ate it all in haste and asked for more, and then the poor folk, for fear, fed Hunger quickly, with green leeks and peas, they thought to poison him. By that, harvest-time drew nigh and new corn came to market. Then the folk were glad, and fed Hunger with the best, with good ale as Glutton taught, and made him go to sleep.

And then Waster would not work, but wander about, and no beggar ate bread that had beans in it, but only bread of coket or clerematyn<sup>1</sup> or else of pure wheat; nor any halfpenny ale he would in no wise drink, but the best and the brownest sold in the town.

Labourers that have no land to live on but their hands, deigned not to dine at morn on herbs a night old. No penny ale can please them nor any piece of bacon, but only fresh flesh or fish, fried or baked, and that *chaud* or *plus chaud*<sup>2</sup> against cold in their maw. And except he be hired at a high price he will complain and bemoan the time that he was

<sup>1</sup> Fine kinds of white bread.

<sup>2</sup> Hot or hotter.

made a workman. He talketh against Cato's<sup>1</sup> counsel, *Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento.*<sup>2</sup> He complaineth against God and grumbleth against Reason, and then he curseth the King and all his council for making such laws to vex labourers. But while Hunger was their master there would none of them complain, nor strive against his statute, so sternly he looked after them.

"But I warn you, workmen, earn while ye may; for Hunger hasteneth fast hitherward, and shall awake to chastise wasters with water floods. Ere five years be fulfilled such famine shall arise, and fruits shall fail through floods and foul weather, and so said Saturn<sup>3</sup> and sent to warn you. When ye see the sun amiss and two monks' heads, and a maid have the mastery and multiply by eight, then shall the Death withdraw and Dearth be Justice, and Daw the ditcher die for hunger, except God, of His goodness, grant us relief."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius Cato; the name commonly given to the author of a Latin work (*Dionysii Catonis Disticha de Moribus ad Filium*) very popular in the Middle Ages, from which Langland here quotes. There were English and French versions of the book.

<sup>2</sup> Remember to bear the burden of poverty patiently.

<sup>3</sup> The evil influence of the planet Saturn was often thought to bring disaster.

<sup>4</sup> One of the mysterious prophecies then popular. The Death = the pestilence.

## PASSUS VII.

*Truth sends Piers a bull of pardon—A Priest disputes its legality—The dispute awakens the Dreamer—A good life will be better than trust in indulgences at the Day of Doom.*

TRUTH heard tell thereof and sent to Piers, and bade him take his team and till the earth, and provided him a pardon, *a pena et a culpa*,<sup>1</sup> for him and his heirs for evermore. And he bade him stay at home and plough his fields; and to all that helped him to plough, to plant, or to sow, or did any other service that might avail Piers, Truth granted pardon with Piers Plowman.

Kings and knights that guard Holy Church, and rule the people rightfully in kingdoms, have pardon to pass full easily through Purgatory, and to be companions with patriarchs and prophets in Paradise. Holy bishops, if they be as they should, advocates of both the laws,<sup>2</sup> and therewith preachers to the ignorant; and inasmuch as they can amend all the sinful, are peers with the apostles (this pardon

<sup>1</sup> From temporal and eternal punishment.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, duty to God and to men.

showeth Piers), and at the Day of Doom shall sit at the high dais.

Merchants to the good had many years (remission of purgatory), but the Pope would grant none of them *a pena et a culpa*, because they keep not their holy days as Holy Church teacheth, and they swear "By their soul," and "So God must help them," against good conscience, to sell their wares.

But Truth sent them a letter under his secret seal that they should buy openly what best pleased them, and afterwards sell it again and save the profit, and repair therewith *mesondieux*<sup>1</sup> and help sick folk, and busily mend bad roads and build up bridges that were broken down; help maidens to marry or make them nuns; find food for prisoners and poor people; put scholars to school or to some other craft; help religious Orders and ask fairer rents;—"and I myself will send St. Michael, my archangel, that no devil shall injure you nor affright you when you are dying. And I will guard you from despair if ye do thus, and will send your souls safely to my saints in joy."

Then were the merchants glad, many wept for joy, and praised Piers the Plowman who provided this bull.

The men of law who had pleaded for Meed had the least pardon, for the Psalter doth not save such as take gifts, and especially from innocents that know no evil; *Super*<sup>2</sup> *innocentem munera non accipies*. Pleaders should take trouble to plead for such and help them, princes and prelates should pay for their

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, houses of God—hospitals.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 63.



labour, *A regibus et pryncipibus erit merces eorum.*<sup>1</sup> But many a justice and juror would do more for John<sup>2</sup> than *pro dei pietate*,<sup>3</sup> believe thou naught else ! But he that spendeth his speech and speaketh for the poor that are innocent and needy and harm no man, comforteth them in their ill-fortune without coveting gifts, and for our Lord's love showeth the law as he hath learned it, there shall no devil injure him by a mite's worth at his death-day, and he shall be safe with his soul, as the Psalter beareth witness. *Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo ?*<sup>4</sup> etc. But to buy water, or wind or wit, or fire the fourth,—these four the Father of Heaven made in common for the earth, and these are Truth's treasures to help honest folk ; they shall never wax or wane without God Himself.

When they come to die who take from poor men Meed for their pleading, and would have indulgences, their pardon is full small at their departure hence. Ye legists and lawyers hold this true ; that if I lie Matthew is to blame, for he bade me write this to you, and told me this saying *Quodcumque vultis ut faciant vobis homines, facite eis.*<sup>5</sup>

All labourers living who live by their hands, and take wage honestly and honestly earn, and live in

<sup>1</sup> From kings and princes shall their reward be.

<sup>2</sup> Probably the image of St. John the Baptist on the coin ; so = money. Cf. p. 54 "*Mouton*," and p. 88 "*Cross*."

<sup>3</sup> For the mercy of God.

<sup>4</sup> Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle ?

<sup>5</sup> Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them.

love and under law, because of their lowly hearts, shall have the same absolution that was sent to Piers.

Beggars nor bidders are not in the bull, except the cause be honest which maketh them beg. For he who beggeth or asketh, except he have need, he is false like the devil and defraudeth the needy; and he also beguileth the giver against his will, for if he knew he were not needy, he would give to another more needy than he, and so would the neediest be helped. Cato and the clerk of the Stories<sup>1</sup> teach men thus; *Cui des, videto*<sup>2</sup> is Cato's teaching, and in the Stories he teacheth how to bestow thine alms: *Sit elemosina tua in manu tua donec studes cui des.*<sup>3</sup> But Gregory was a good man, and bade us give to all who ask, for His love who giveth to us all: *Non eligas cui miserearis, ne forte pretereas illum qui meretur accipere. Quia incertum est pro quo Deo magis placeas.*<sup>4</sup> For ye know never who is worthy, but God knoweth who hath need. In him that taketh is the treachery, if there be any sin; for he who giveth, payeth and prepareth him for rest; and he who beggeth, borroweth, and bringeth himself into debt. For beggars borrow evermore, and their surety is God Almighty to repay them that give to them, and with usury

<sup>1</sup> Probably Peter Comestor, who wrote the *Historia Scholastica*, and died about 1198.

<sup>2</sup> Consider to whom thou givest.

<sup>3</sup> Let thine alms be in thine hand until thou knowest to whom thou givest.

<sup>4</sup> Thou shalt not choose on whom thou wilt have pity, lest perchance thou pass by him who deserves to receive; for it is uncertain on behalf of whom thou mayest please God first.

thereto. *Quare non dedisti pecuniam meam ad mensam, ut ego veniens cum usuris exegissem illam ?*<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, beg not, ye beggars, except ye have great need ; for whoso hath wherewith to buy him bread, the Book beareth witness that he hath enough that hath bread enough, though he have naught else : *Satis dives est, qui non indiget pane.*<sup>2</sup> Let your solace be in reading saints' lives. The Book forbiddeth beggary, and blameth it in this manner : *Junior fui, etenim senui ; et non vidi iustum derelictum, nec semen ejus querens panem.*<sup>3</sup> For ye beggars live in no love nor keep no law ; many of you wed not the women ye go with, but as wild beasts, neighing, are up and doing, and bring forth children that men call bastards. In their youth they break their back or some bone, and then ye go falsely begging with your children for ever after. There are more misshapen people among these beggars than among all other manner of men who walk the earth. And he who liveth his life thus, when he goeth hence may loath the time that ever he was made man.

But old and hoary men, that are helpless, and women with child who cannot work, the blind and the bedridden, and those with broken limbs,<sup>4</sup> who

<sup>1</sup> Why didst thou not put out thy money at interest, so that at my coming I might have required it with usury ?

<sup>2</sup> He is rich enough who lacks not bread. See p. 148 of Appendix for a passage in C-Text.

<sup>3</sup> I have been young and now am old ; and I have not seen the just abandoned nor his seed begging their bread.

<sup>4</sup> C-Text adds here the following : " And all poor patient ones, content with God's will, such as lepers, and poor folks

take their mischance meekly, such as lepers and others, shall have as full pardon as the Plowman himself; for love of their lowly hearts our Lord hath granted them their penance and purgatory here on earth.<sup>1</sup>

"Piers," quoth a priest then, "I must read thy pardon, for I will interpret each clause and tell it thee in English."

And Piers unfoldeth the pardon at his bidding, and I, behind them both, beheld all the bull. All in two lines it lay, and not a leaf more, and was written thus on Truth's witness:—

*"Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam,  
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum."*<sup>2</sup>

"Peter!" quoth the priest then, "I can find no pardon, except 'Do well and have well, and God shall have thy soul; and do evil and have evil, and hope thou no other but that after thy death-day the devil shall have thy soul!'"

And Piers, for pure vexation, tore it in twain, and said, *si ambulauero, in medio umbre mortis, non timebo mala; quoniam tu mecum es.*<sup>3</sup> "I shall cease from

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fallen on misfortune, such as prisoners, and pilgrims; peradventure they were robbed or slandered by evil men, and then lost their goods, or have fallen into poverty through fire or flood."

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 152, for passage in C-Text.

<sup>2</sup> And those who have done good shall go into life eternal, and those who have done evil into everlasting fire.

<sup>3</sup> If I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me,

my sowing," said Piers, "and labour not so hard, no more be so busy for delighting of my maw. Hereafter my plough shall be of prayers and penance, and I will weep when I should sleep, though wheat-bread may fail me. The prophet ate his bread in penance and sorrow, and by what the Psalter saith, so did many others; whoso loveth God faithfully his livelihood is full easy. *Fuerunt michi lacrimi mee panes die ac nocte.*<sup>1</sup> And, unless Luke lie, he teacheth us by the fowls that we should not be too busy about the world's bliss. *Ne solliciti sitis,*<sup>2</sup> he saith in the gospel; and to guide us showeth us examples. The fowls in the field, who findeth them meat in winter? They have no garner to go to, but God provideth for them all."

"What!" said the priest to Perkin, "Peter! methinketh thou art lettered a little, who taught thee thy book?"

"Abstinence the Abbess taught me my A B C," quoth Piers, "and afterwards Conscience came and told me much more."

"Wert thou a priest, Piers," said he, "thou mightest preach where thou shouldst, as a divine in divinity, with *dixit insipiens,*<sup>3</sup> for thy theme."

"Ignorant fool!" said Piers, "little dost thou look on the Bible, seldom dost thou behold Solomon's saws, *Eice derisores et iurgia cum eis, ne crescant,*"<sup>4</sup> etc.

<sup>1</sup> My tears have been my bread day and night.

<sup>2</sup> Be not troubled.

<sup>3</sup> The fool hath spoken.

<sup>4</sup> Cast forth scorners, and contentions with them, lest they increase.

The priest and Perkin disputed one with the other, and through their words I awoke, and looked about, and saw the sun then in the south; meatless and moneyless, on Malvern Hills, and musing on this dream, I went my way.

Many a time this dream hath made me ponder on what I saw asleep, whether it might be so; and also, full pensive of heart, concerning Piers the Plowman, and what kind of pardon Piers had to comfort all the people, and how the priest impugned it through two special words. But I have no pleasure in divination of dreams, for I see it often fail.

Cato and canonists counsel us to cease to put faith in divination of dreams, for *sompnia ne cures*.<sup>1</sup>

But yet the book Bible beareth witness how Daniel divined the dreams of a king, that was called by clerks Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel said, "Sir King, thy dream betokeneth that strange knights shall come to cleave thy kingdom; among lower lords thy land shall be divided." And as Daniel divined, it befell, indeed, afterwards, and the king lost his lordship and lower men had it.

And Joseph dreamed marvellously how the moon and the sun and the eleven stars all made to him obeisance. Then Jacob declared Joseph's dream: "*Beau filtz*,"<sup>2</sup> said his father, "I myself and my sons, for want and for need shall come to seek thee." It befell as his father had said, in the time of Pharaoh, that Joseph was Justice and governed Egypt, and

<sup>1</sup> Heed not dreams.

<sup>2</sup> Fair son.

again it befell as his father had told, that his friends sought him there.

And all this maketh me think upon this dream. And how the priest proved no pardon as good as Do-well,<sup>1</sup> and thought that Do-well surpassed indulgences, biennials<sup>2</sup> and triennials,<sup>2</sup> and bishops' letters, and how Do-well shall be worthily received at the day of doom, and shall surpass all the pardon of St. Peter's Church.

Now the Pope hath power to grant the people pardon to pass into heaven without any penance. This is our belief, as lettered men teach us. *Quodcumque ligaueris super terram, erit ligatum et in celis*,<sup>3</sup> etc. And so I truly believe (Lord forbid else!) that pardon and penance and prayers cause indeed souls to be saved which have sinned deadly seven times. But to trust to these triennials, methinketh truly, is not so safe for the soul, certes, as is Do-well.

Therefore, I counsel you, ye men that are rich on this earth, and can have triennials on trust of your treasure, be ye never the bolder to break the ten commandments; and especially, ye masters, mayors, and judges, who are held for wise men, and have the wealth of this world to purchase pardon and the Pope's bulls. At the dreadful Doom, when the dead shall rise and all come before Christ to yield account,

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, doing well, living a good life, here personified.

<sup>2</sup> Masses said daily for a departed soul during periods of two (biennial) or three (triennial) years.

<sup>3</sup> Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven.

how thou didst lead thy life here and didst keep His laws, and how thou didst, day by day, the Doom will declare. A bagful of pardons there, or provincial letters, or though ye be found in the fraternity of all the four Orders, and have indulgences doublefold—except Do-well help you I set your patents and your pardons at the worth of a pea-shell! Therefore I counsel all Christians to cry God mercy, and may Mary His mother be our mediator, that God may give us grace here ere we go hence, to do such deeds while we are here, that after our death day, Do-well may declare at the Day of Doom that we did as he bade.



## APPENDICES



## A

### THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE LONGER PASSAGES ADDED TO *PIERS THE PLOWMAN* IN THE C-TEXT.

(See Page 56.)

“THOUGH they give them dishonest measure they hold it no fraud; and though they fill not full the measure sealed by law<sup>1</sup> they grasp for it as much as for the true measure.

“Many sundry sorrows often hap in cities, both through fire and flood, and all because of dishonest men who beguile the good and vex them wrongly; and these cry on their knees for Christ to avenge them, either here on earth, or in hell, upon those who cheat them of their goods. And God sendeth upon them fevers, or fouller evils, or fire in their houses, or murrain, or other misfortune; and it befalleth many a time that Innocence is heard in heaven among the saints, who pray both to our Lord and our Lady to grant these deceivers grace to amend on earth, and to have their penance on earth alone, and not the torment of hell.

<sup>1</sup> Measures were marked or sealed by law in order to prevent fraud.

“And then there falleth fire on false men’s houses, and for their sins good men burn in the fire. All this we have seen when sometimes, through a brewer, many houses are burned and the dwellers in them; and because of a candle guttering in an evil place, which fell down and forthwith burnt up all the row.

“Therefore, methinketh that mayors who make freemen ought to ask and find out, in spite of any word of silver, what manner of trade or merchandise such an one may use before he be made free and fellow on your rolls. Forsooth, it is not seemly, either in city or borough, that usurers or registrars, for any kind of bribe, be franchised and made free men and bear a false name.”

[C. Passus iv. ll. 87-114.]

(*See Page 60.*)

“But I saved myself and sixty thousand lives, both here and elsewhere, in every land. But, if any durst say it, thou thyself, truly, hast made dull the heart of many bold men who had will to fight—to burn, and break in pieces, and beat down strongholds.

“In the lands whither the King went Conscience hindered him, so that he felled not his foes, though Fortune willed it, and as his destiny was ordained by our Lord’s will.

“Like a caitiff, thou, Conscience, didst counsel the King to leave his heritage of France in his enemy’s hand. Unwise is that conscience which selleth a kingdom that is conquered through the help

of all; a kingdom or duchy may verily not be sold, for so many folk who fought for it and followed the King's will, ask their share of it. The least lad who followeth him, if the land be won, looketh for lordship or some other large meed, whereby he may live for ever after as befitteth a man. And that is the manner of a king who conquereth his enemies—to provide well for all his host or else to grant his men all that they can win, therewith to do what they best would. Therefore I counsel no king to ask any counsel of Conscience, if he covet to conquer a realm; for never should Conscience be my constable, by Mary, were I a crowned king," said Meed, "nor be marshal of my men where I must fight."

[C. Passus iv. ll. 234–258.]

(*See Page 62.*)

"There is no man living who loveth not Meed, and is not glad to seize her, whether great lord or poor man. . . ."

Said Conscience to the King, . . . "There is Meed and Mercede<sup>1</sup> and men deem both their due for certain deeds, secret or otherwise. Oftentimes men give Meed before the thing is done, and that is neither reason nor right, nor law in any realm, that a man should take Meed except he deserve it; nor to undertake to work for another while he wotteth not verily whether he may live so long, nor have good hap in his health to earn Meed.

<sup>1</sup> Mercede = wages due for work done.

"I hold him over-bold, or else not honest, who is paid *pre manibus*,<sup>1</sup> or else asketh it. Harlots and false leeches ask their wage ere they have earned it. And deceivers give beforehand, and good men at the end, when the deed is done and the day ended. And that is no Meed, but Mercede, and a kind of debt due for the doing."

[C. Passus iv. ll. 283, etc.]

(See Page 77.)

"But, Reason, be thou my chief Chancellor in Exchequer and in Parliament, and Conscience be King's Justice in all my Courts."

"I assent," said Reason, "if so be that thou thyself hear, *audi alteram partem*<sup>2</sup> among aldermen and commoners; and so that unfitting Sufferance<sup>3</sup> seal not your private letters, nor send *supersedeas*, except I assent. And I dare lay my life that Love will give the silver to pay the hire of thy servants, and help to get what thou desirest, more than all thy merchants or thy mitred bishops, or Lombards of Lucca, who live by lending like Jews."

The King then commanded Conscience to send away all his officers and to receive those that Reason loved; and right with that I waked.

[C. Passus v. ll. 185-196.]

<sup>1</sup> Beforehand.

<sup>2</sup> Hear the other side.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, fraudulent connivance.

(See Page 77.)

Thus I awaked, God wot, when I dwelt on Cornhill, Kit and I in a cottage; clothed like a loller<sup>1</sup> and little set by, in sooth, believe me, among lollers of London and ignorant hermits, for I made verse on these men as Reason taught me. For as I came by Conscience I met with Reason, in a hot harvest-time, when I had my health, and limbs to labour with, and loved to fare well and do nothing but drink and sleep; thus in health of body and wholeness of mind, one then questioned me; roaming through remembrance, thus Reason reproved me:—

“Canst thou serve or sing in a church,” he said, “or cock hay for my harvest men, or pitch it in the cart, mow or stack it, or bind into sheaves; reap, or be a master-reaper and arise early; or have a horn and he a hedge-warder,<sup>2</sup> and lie out at nights and keep my corn in my croft from plunderers and thieves? Or make shoes or clothes, or keep sheep or kine, hedge or harrow, or drive swine or geese, or follow any other craft that the folk need in common to provide livelihood for the bed-ridden?”

“Certes,” I said, “and so God help me, I am too weak to work with sickle or scythe, and too long, believe me, to stoop low to work as a workman, for any length of time.”

<sup>1</sup> A lounging, an idle vagabond.

<sup>2</sup> One who had to see that the cattle were kept within their right boundaries.

"Then hast thou lands to live by," said Reason, "or rich kindred who find thy food? For thou seemest an idle man, a spender that must spend, or a waster of time, or beggest thou about for thy living at men's doors, or in churches upon Fridays or feast-days? The which is a loller's life, little praised where righteousness giveth reward according as men earn it, *reddit unicuique iuxta opera sua*.<sup>1</sup> Or thou art injured, maybe, in body or in limb, or maimed through some mishap, whereby thou mayest be excused?"

"When I was young," I said, "many years ago, my father and my friends found wherewith to school me, till I knew assuredly what Holy Writ meant, and what is best for the body, and most safe for the soul, as the Book telleth, if so be that I continue it. And yet since my friends died I never found, forsooth, a life that pleased me except in these long robes. If I must live by labour and earn a livelihood, that labour that I learned best, thereby must I live. *In eadem vocatione in qua vocati estis, manete*.<sup>2</sup> And I live both in London and upon London; the tools that I work with and earn a living are *paternoster* and my primer *placebo* and *dirige*, and sometimes my Psalter and my Seven Psalms. Thus I sing for the souls of such as help me, and those who find me my food undertake, I trow, to make me welcome when I come at times in a month, now to him and now to her; and in this manner I beg without bag or bottle, save

<sup>1</sup> He renders to every one according to his works.

<sup>2</sup> In the same calling wherein ye have been called, abide.



my maw only. And also moreover, methinketh, Sir Reason, men should constrain no clerk to the work of knaves, for by the law of *Levitici* that our Lord ordained, clerks that are crowned<sup>1</sup> by conscience<sup>2</sup> should neither labour nor sweat, nor swear at inquests, nor fight in the van nor grieve their foes: *non reddas malum pro malo*.<sup>3</sup> For all who are crowned are heirs of heaven, and in the choir or in churches are Christ's own ministers. It becometh clerks to serve Christ, and uncrowned knaves to drive the cart and to work. For no clerk should be crowned except he come of franklins and free men and of wedded folk. Bondmen and bastards and beggars' children, to these it belongeth to labour; and to the Lord's kindred to serve both God and good men, as their degree requireth; some to sing Masses, or sit and write, to advise and to receive what Reason ought to spend. But since bondmen's sons have been made bishops, and bastards' offspring have been archdeacons, and soap-dealers and their sons have been ✓ made knights for silver; and lords' sons their labourers; and laid their revenues in pledge for the right of the realm to ride against our enemies, for the Commons' comfort and the King's honour; and monks and nuns who should provide for beggars have made knights of their kindred and purchased the revenue of knights—popes and patrons refuse poor gentle blood,

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, tonsured.

<sup>2</sup> *Lit.*, "kynde understandyng"—*i.e.*, the inner voice which prompted the choice of the life of a clerk.

<sup>3</sup> Render not evil for evil.

and choose Simon's son<sup>1</sup> to keep the sanctuary. Holy living and love have been long hence, and will be till this be worn out or otherwise changed.

"Therefore, rebuke me right naught, Reason, I pray you, for in my conscience I know what Christ would that I should do. The prayers of an upright man and discreet penance is the best labour to please our Lord. *Non de solo*," I said, "forsooth, *vivit homo, nec in pane et pabulo*<sup>2</sup> the *paternoster* witnesseth; *fiat voluntas tua*<sup>3</sup> findeth us all things."

Said Conscience, "By Christ I cannot see how this applieth, but it seemeth not uprightness to beg in cities, except one be Obediencer<sup>4</sup> to priory or minster."

"That is true," I said, "and so I confess that I have lost and misspent time; and yet I hope, as he that oft hath chaffered and aye hath lost and lost, and at last it hath happened him that he made such a bargain that he was ever after the richer, and at the end set his loss at a leaf's worth, such a winning was it to him by the words of His grace; *Simile est regnum celorum thesauro abscondito in agro*, etc.: *Mulier que invenit dragmam unam*,<sup>5</sup> etc.; even so I

<sup>1</sup> That is, the son of Simon Magus, or one who has been guilty of Simony—whose wealth was his recommendation (Skeat).

<sup>2</sup> Not alone by bread and meat man liveth.

<sup>3</sup> Thy will be done.

<sup>4</sup> A certain officer in a monastery.

<sup>5</sup> The kingdom of heaven is like to a treasure hid in a field, etc. [See also concerning] The woman who found the drachma.

hope to have from Him who is almighty a share of His grace, and begin a time that will turn all the times of my time to profit."

"I counsel thee," then quoth Reason, "haste thee to begin the life that is worthy and honest for the soul."

"Yea, and continue it," said Conscience; and to the church I went.

To the church I went to honour God, and before the cross on my knees I knocked my breast, sighing for my sins, saying my *paternoster*, and weeping and wailing till I was asleep.

[C. Passus vi. ll. 1-108.]

(See Page 80. The passage answering to this in the B-Text is found in B. X. 292-320.)

Gregory the great clerk bade write in books the rule for all religious Orders which were righteous and obedient. Even as fishes in the flood, when water faileth them die for drought when they lie dry, so a religious Order rotteth and dieth that coveteth to dwell outside convent and cloister. For if heaven be on this earth or any ease for the soul, it is in cloister or school, I find, for many reasons. For in cloister no man cometh to chide or fight, and in school there is lowliness and love and liking to learn. But many a day men tell that both monks and canons have ridden out in array and kept their rule ill, and have been leaders of love-days, and have purchased lands, and ridden about on palfreys from mansion to manor, a pack of hounds at his back as

if he were a lord. And except his knave kneel who holdeth his cup, he looketh scowling and calleth him "lordein."<sup>1</sup> Little had lords to do to give lands away from their heirs to religious Orders, who have no ruth, though it rain on their altars. In mansions where these parsons are at ease by themselves no pity have they on the poor; that is their pure charity. Ye all hold yourselves lords, your land lieth too broad. But yet there shall come a king and confess you all, and beat you for breaking your rule, as the Bible telleth; and put you to your penance *ad pristinum statum ire*.<sup>2</sup> Barons and their offspring shall blame and reprove you; *Hii in curribus et hi in equis: ipsi obligati sunt, et ceciderunt*.<sup>3</sup> Friars in their refectory shall find in that time bread without begging, to live by ever afterwards, and Constantine<sup>4</sup> shall be their cook and the restorer of their churches. For the Abbot of England<sup>5</sup> and the Abbess, his niece, shall have a knock on their crowns, and incurable shall be the wound; *contriuit dominus baculum im-*

<sup>1</sup> Lazy villain.

<sup>2</sup> To return to the first condition.

<sup>3</sup> Some (trust) in chariots and some in horses; they are brought down and have fallen.

<sup>4</sup> It was a legend of the Middle Ages that Constantine bestowed his territory in Italy upon the Pope. This passage "seems to look forward to a time when the friars should be supported by some kind of regular endowment."

<sup>5</sup> Another reading for "England" is "Abingdon." At Abingdon there was an old and well-known Abbey. "It was the house into which the monks, strictly so called, were first introduced into England, and is, therefore, very properly, introduced as the representative of English monachism" (Wright quoted by Skeat).

*piorum virgam dominancium plaga in-sanabili.*<sup>1</sup> But ere that king come, as Chronicles have told me, clerks and Holy Church shall be clothed anew.

[C. Passus vi. ll. 147-180.]

(See Page 81.)

I, Pride,<sup>2</sup> patiently ask penance, because foremost and first I have been disobedient to father and mother; and disobedient and not abashed to offend God and all good men, so high was my heart; disobedient to Holy Church and to them who served there. I judged some for their evil vices, and excited others through my word and my wit to show their evil works: and scorned them and others if I found a reason, laughing all aloud so that unlearned men should ween that I was cleverer and wiser than another; a mocker and unreasonable to them who showed reason, in all kinds of ways, so that my name should be known; seeming to be sovereign wheresoever it befel me to tell any tale, I trowed me wiser to speak or to counsel than any clerk or layman. Proud of my apparel and my bearing among the people, more than I have reason for, within or without; wishing that men should ween I were, in what I was, and had, rich, eloquent, and righteous of life; boasting and bragging with many

<sup>1</sup> The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of the rulers, with an incurable stroke.

<sup>2</sup> This addition to the B-Text gives a second example of Pride. Pernel Proudheart (in B, see p. 81) was a female character. Here, Pride is a man.

bold oaths, vaunting in my vainglory in spite of any reproof; and, again, so much above all others in the people's sight that there was none such as myself nor none so pope-holy.<sup>1</sup>

Sometime with one appearance, sometime with another; in every covetous way I thus contrived a hundred times how I could be held for holy. I wished that men should think my deeds were the best, and I the most learned in my craft among clerks and others, and the strongest upon my steed, and the sturdiest in body, and the handsomest to look on, proud of my fair features and because I sang clearly. And what I gave for God's love I told to my friends, for them to think that I was right holy and full of almsgiving; and yet none else so bold a beggar to pray and to crave; telling tales in taverns and streets, of things that were never thought, and yet I sware I saw them, and lied by both my body and my life. Of deeds that I did well I get witness, and say to such as sit beside me—"Lo! if ye believe me not, or ye ween I lie, ask of him or of her, and they can tell you what I suffered and saw, and at some time had, and what I knew and could do, and what kin I came of."

[C. Passus vii. ll. 14-58.]

(See Page 83.)

All that he knew about Will he told it to Watkin, and all that he knew of Watkin he told it after to

<sup>1</sup> This is literal—holy as the Pope; used here to mean hypocritical.

Will. And he made foes of friends through his false and faithless tongue, "Or through strong speech or many tricks I avenged me oft or fretted<sup>1</sup> myself within like a tailor's shears, and cursed my fellow Christians. . . . When I may not have the mastery I take such melancholy that I catch the cramp, and sometimes spasms of the heart, or the ague, in such a fit of anger; and sometimes a fever that seizeth me for a whole twelvemonth, until I despise our Lord's leechcraft and trust in a witch and say that neither clerk nor Christ can do as the cobbler of Southwark, such grace is his. For God nor God's words, nor grace, never availed, but through a charm I have had good hap and my greatest healing.

[C. Passus vii. ll. 70-85.]

(See Page 90.)

With false words and tricks I have got my goods and with guile and deceit gathered what I have; I mixed up my wares and made a good show, while the worst lay beneath, and I held it a fine trick. And if my neighbour had a hind, or any beast else, more profitable than mine, I made many plans, and cast about with all my wit how I might get it; and except I got it by any other way, at last I stole it, or privily shook his purse and unpicked his locks. And if I went to the plough I pinched a bit from his

<sup>1</sup> The reading "frete" is taken here. "Envy fretted himself internally, just as the inner edges of a tailor's pair of shears grate against each other when used."

half-acre, so that I would steal away a foot of land or a furrow from my next neighbour's ground. And if I reaped I would over-reach, or gave counsel to them who reaped to seize for me with their sickle what I never had sowed, . . . and if I sent my servant over sea to Bruges, or my prentice into Prussia to look after my profit, to trade with money and make exchange, never could any man comfort me in the meantime, neither could Matins nor Mass, nor any other manner of sight; and I never performed penance nor said *paternoster* that my mind was not more with my goods than with God's grace and His great might.

[C. Passus vii. ll. 259-285.]

(See Page 127.)

✓ The most needy are our neighbours if we take good heed, such as prisoners in dungeons or poor folk in cottages, burdened with children and the landlord's rent. What they save by their spinning they spend it in house-hire, also in milk and meal to make porridge with, to fill their children who cry after food. And they themselves suffer much hunger and woe in winter-time when they wake at nights to rise to rock the cradle, and also when they card and comb, and patch and wash and rub, and reel, and peel rushes, so that ruth is it to read or show in rime the woe of those women who dwell in cottages, as well as of any other men who suffer much woe, in hunger and thirst, that they may turn the fair side



outward ; and are abashed to beg, and will not let it be known to their neighbours what they need at noon and eve.

Verily I know also, as the world teacheth, what befalleth another, who hath many children, and hath no wealth but his craft to clothe and feed them with, and many to grasp thereat, and who taketh few pence. Their bread and penny ale are taken instead of pittance,<sup>1</sup> and cold flesh and cold fish instead of baked venison. On Fridays and fasting days a farthing's-worth of mussels, or as many cockles, were a feast for such folk. It were alms to help those that have such burdens, and to comfort such cotters, and crooked men and blind.

But beggars with bags, whose churches are brew-houses, except they be blind or deformed or else sick, though they fall down for want that thus beg falsely for a living, reckon them not, ye rich, though such rascals starve. For all that have their health and their eyesight, and limbs to labour with, and yet follow lollers' life, live against God's law and the teaching of Holy Church.

And yet there are other beggars in health, it seemeth, both men and women, but they want their wit ; the which are lunatic lollers and wanderers, mad, more or less, according as the moon standeth. They care for no cold, nor take count of heat, and move along with the moon, and go moneyless and

<sup>1</sup> A *pittance* at that time meant "an extraordinary allowance of victuals given to monastics in addition to their usual commons" (Tyrwhitt, quoted by Skeat).

witless, with a good will, in many far countries; just as Peter and Paul did, except that they preach not nor do miracles. But many times it befalleth them to prophesy concerning the people, as it were in mirth. And in our sight, it seemeth since God has the might to give each man wit, wealth, and health, and yet suffereth these to go thus (it seemeth to my thinking), that such people are His apostles, or His privy disciples, for He hath sent them forth silverless, and in a summer garment, without bread and bag as the book telleth, *Quando misi vos sini pane et pera*;<sup>1</sup> barefoot and breadless they beg of no man. And though one may meet with the mayor in the street he reverenceth him right naught more than another; *Neminem salutaueritis per viam*.<sup>2</sup> Such manner of men Matthew teacheth us we should take to house and help them when they come; *Et egenos vagosque induc in domum tuam*.<sup>3</sup> For they are merry-mouthed men and minstrels of heaven, and are God's servants, jesters, as the Book telleth, *Si quis videtur sapiens, fiet stultus ut sit sapiens*.<sup>4</sup> Men know full well that it belongeth to the rich to receive all minstrels kindly, to the love of lords and ladies that they live with. Men suffer all that such say and take it for merriment, and do still more for such men, before they go, and give them gifts and gold for great lords'

<sup>1</sup> When I sent you without bread and scrip.

<sup>2</sup> Ye shall salute no man by the way.

<sup>3</sup> And the needy and wandering bring into thine house.

<sup>4</sup> If any seemeth wise, let him become a fool that he may be wise.

sakes. Right so, ye rich, ye should forsooth rather welcome and honour and help with your wealth God's minstrels and His messengers and His merry jesters, the which are lunatic lollers and wanderers, for under God's secret seal their sins are covered.

For they bear no bags nor bottles under their cloaks; which belongeth to the life of lollers and of ignorant hermits who seem full humble to gain men's alms, in hope to sit at even by the hot coals, to spread abroad their legs or lie at their ease, to rest and roast and turn their back, to drink deep and dry, and then betake themselves to bed and arise when it pleaseth them. When they are risen they roam about and spy right well where they may soonest have a meal, or a round of bacon, silver or sodden meat, and sometimes both; a loaf or half a loaf or a lump of cheese, and carry it home to their cottage, and cast about how to live in idleness and ease and by others' travail.

And whatsoever man wandereth thus with a bag at his back in beggar's guise, and knoweth some kind of craft, in case he wished to use it, through which craft he could come at bread and ale, and, moreover, to a garment to cover his bones, and yet liveth like a loller—God's law damneth him. "Lollers living in sloth, and roamers over the land, are not in this bull," said Piers, "until they amend them."

[C. Passus x. ll. 71-160.]

(See Page 128.)

But hermits that live by the highways, and in towns among brewers, and beg in churches;—all that the holy hermits hated and despised, such as riches, reverences, and rich men's alms, these lollers, thieves, and worthless hermits covet the contrary, and live as cotters. For they are but as knaves and drunkards at the alehouse, neither of good lineage, nor learning, nor holy of life, as hermits who of old dwelt in woods with bears and lions. Some of these had livelihood from their kindred and from no man else, and some lived by their learning and the labour of their hands; some had strangers for friends who sent them food, and to some birds brought bread whereby they lived. All these holy hermits were of noble kin, they forsook land and lordship and pleasures of the body.

But these hermits who build their dwelling by the highway, of yore were workmen, weavers and tailors and carters' knaves and graceless clerks. They kept full hungry house and had much want, long labour and little earning, and at last espied that liars in friars' clothing had fat cheeks. Therefore these unlearned knaves left their labour and clothed themselves in cloaks like clerks, or as if they were of some Order, or else prophets. . . . Now, by Christ, rightly are such called "lollers," after the English of our elders, as old men teach. He that lolleth is lame, or his leg out of joint, or maimed in some limb, for it pointeth to some mishap.

And even thus, truly, such manner of hermits "loll" against the faith and law of Holy Church. For Holy Church biddeth all manner of people to be under obedience and submissive to the law. First, the Religious Orders, to keep their rule and be under obedience day and night; unlearned men to labour; and lords to hunt in woods and forests for foxes and other beasts which are in the wild woods and waste places, such as wolves that worry men, women, and children. And all to cease on Sundays that they may hear God's service, both Matins and Mass; and after meat ought every man to hear Evensong in churches.

Thus it behoveth to lord and clerk and layman to hear the service wholly each holy-day, and furthermore to keep vigils and fasting days, and to fulfil those fastings, except infirmity cause otherwise—poverty or other penances, such as pilgrimages and needful labour. Under this obedience are we each one; whoso breaketh this, be well aware that except he repent, amend, and ask mercy, and humbly shrive him, I fear me, if he die, it shall be counted for deadly sin before Christ, except Conscience excuse him.

Look now whether these lollers and ignorant hermits, who are so far from church, break this obedience? Where see we them on Sundays hearing the service, such as Matins in the morning? Till Mass begin, or till Sundays at Evensong we see right few! Or do they labour for their living as the law would? But rather at midday mealtime oft I meet

with him going in a cloak as if he were a clerk; a bachelor or a holy father best beseemeth him! And for the cloth that covereth him he is called a friar, and washeth and wipeth and sitteth with the first. But while he laboured in the world, and earned his meat with honesty, he sat at the side bench and second table, and no wine came into his maw through the week long, nor blanket in his bed, nor white bread before him.

The cause of all this villainy cometh from many bishops who suffer such sots and other sins to rule. Certes, if one durst say it, *Symon quasi dormit; vigilare*<sup>1</sup> were better, for thou hast a great charge. For many watchful wolves have broken into folds; the barkers<sup>2</sup> are all blind who lead forth thy lambs, *dispergentur oues*,<sup>3</sup> thy dog dare not bark. The tar<sup>4</sup> is ill-made that belongeth to thy sheep, their salve is of *supersedeas* in summoners' boxes;<sup>5</sup> nigh all thy sheep are scabbed, the wolf is surfeited with wool:—

*“Sub molli pastore lupus lanam cacat, et grex  
In-custoditus dilaceratur eo.”*<sup>6</sup>

Ho! Shepherd! where is thy dog and thy bold heart to fight the wolf that befouleth thy wool? I believe

<sup>1</sup> Simon sleeps as it were; to watch.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., dogs.

<sup>3</sup> The sheep shall be scattered.

<sup>4</sup> Every shepherd used to carry a tar-box, which held salve for anointing the sores of sheep.

<sup>5</sup> All the healing salve that the sheep get is that they are smothered with writs of *supersedeas*.

<sup>6</sup> Under a soft [yielding] shepherd the wolf casteth forth wool, and the unguarded flock is therefore torn in pieces.

that for thy sloth thou dost lose many wethers, and full many a fair fleece thou dost wash ill ! When thy lord looketh to have profit for his beasts and for the money thou hadst wherewith to guard his goods, and the wool shall be weighed—woe is thee then !

[C. Passus x. ll. 188, etc.]

## B

### SPECIMENS OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT FROM THE B VERSION (about 1377).<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. *The opening lines of the Prologue* (see p. 23).

In a somer seson · whan soft was the sonne,  
 I shope me in shroudes · as I a shepe were,  
 In habite as an heremite · unholy of workes,  
 Went wyde in þis world · wondres to here.  
 Ac on a May mornynge · on Maluerne hulles,  
 Me byfel a ferly · of fairy, me thouȝte;  
 I was wery forwandred · and went me to reste  
 Under a brode banke · bi a bornes side,  
 And as I lay and lened · and looked in þe wateres,  
 I slombred in a slepyng · it sweyved so merye.

[Prol. ll. 1-10.]

#### 2. *The rats and mice take counsel together to bell the cat* (see p. 30).

Wiþ þat ran þere a route · of ratones at ones,  
 And smale mys myd hem · mo þen a þousande,  
 And comen to a conseil · for here comune profit;  
 For a cat of a courte · cam whan hym lyked,  
 And ouerlepe hem lyȝtlich · and lauȝte hem at his wille,  
 And pleyde wiþ hem perilouslych · and possed hem aboute.  
 ' For doute of dyuerse dredes · we dar nouȝte wel loke;  
 And ȝif we grucche of his gamen · he will greue vs alle,

---

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Professor Skeat, Clarendon Press, 1891.



Cracche vs, or clowe vs · and in his cloches holde,  
 That vs lotheth þe lyf · or he lete vs passe.  
 Myȝte we wiþ any witte · his wille withstonde,  
 We myȝte be lordes aloft · and lyuen at owre ese.'

A raton of renon · most renable of tonge,  
 Seide for a souereygne · help to hym-selue ;—

'I haue ysein segges,' *quod* he, · 'in þe cite of london  
 Beren biȝes ful briȝte · abouten here nekkes,  
 And some colers of crafty werk ; · vncoupled þei wenden  
 Boþe in wareine & in waste · where hem leue lyketh ;  
 And otherwhile þei aren elles-where · as I here telle.  
 Were þere a belle on here beiȝ · bi Iesu, as me thynketh,  
 Men myȝte wite where þei went · and awei renne !

And riȝt so,' *quod* þat ratoun · 'reson me sheweth,  
 To bugge a belle of brasse · or of briȝte syluer,  
 And knitten on a colere · for owre *commune* profit,  
 And hangen it vp-on þe cattles hals · þanne here we mowen,  
 Where he ritt or rest · or renneth to playe.

And ȝif him list for to laike · þenne loke we mowen,  
 And peren in his presence · þer-while hym plaie liketh,  
 And ȝif him wratteth, be ywar · and his weye shonye'

Alle þis route of ratones · to þis reson þei assented.  
 Ac þo þe belle was ybouȝt · and on þe beiȝe hanged,  
 þere ne was ratoun in alle þe route · for alle þe rewme of  
 Fraunce

pat dorst haue ybounden þe belle · about þe cattis nekke,  
 Ne hangen it aboute þe cattles hals · al Engelonde to wyne ;  
 And helden hem vnhardy · and here conseil le feble,  
 And leten here laboure lost · & alle here longe studye.

[Prol. ll. 146-181.]

### 3. *The description of Meed* (see p. 43).

I loked on my left half · as þe lady me taughte,  
 And was war of a womman · wortheli yclothed,  
 Purfiled with pelure · þe finest vpon erthe,  
 Y-crounede with a corone · þe kyng hath non better.  
 Fetislich hir fynGRES · were fretted with golde wyre,  
 And þereon red rubyes · as red as any glede,  
 And diamantz of derrest pris · and double manere safferes,  
 Orientales and ewages · enuenymes to destroye.

Hire robe was ful riche · of red scarlet engreyned,  
 With ribanes of red golde · and of riche stones ;  
 Hire arraye me rauysshed · such ricchesse saw I neuere ;  
 I had wondre what she was · and whas wyf she were.  
 'What is þis womman,' quod I ; 'so worthily atired ?'  
 'That is Mede þe Mayde,' quod she, · 'hath noyed me ful oft.'  
[Passus ii. ll. 7-20.]

#### 4. *From the confession of Avarice* (see p. 86).

'Repentedestow þe euere,' quod repentance, · 'ne restitucioun  
 madest ?'  
 'Ȝus, ones I was herberwed,' quod he, · 'with a hep of chapmen,  
 I roos whan þei were arest · and yrifled here males.'  
 'That was no restitucioun,' quod repentance, · 'but a robberes  
 thefte,  
 þow haddest be better worthy · be hanged þefore  
 þan for al þat · þat þow hast here shewed.'  
 'I wende ryflynge were restitucioun,' quod he, · 'for I lerned neuere  
 rede on boke,  
 And I can no frence in feith · but of þe ferthest ende of norfolke.'  
[Passus v. ll. 232-239.]

#### 5. *The Penitents' search for St. Truth* (see p. 102).

A thousand of men þo · thrungen togyderes ;  
 Criede vpward to cryst · and to his clene moder,  
 To haue grace to go with hem · treuthe to seke.  
 Ac þere was wyȝte non so wys · þe wey þider couthe,  
 But blustreden forth as bestes · ouer bankes and hilles,  
 Till late was and longe · þat þei lede mette,  
 Apparailled as a paynym · in pylgrymes wyse.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

'Knowestow ouȝte a corseint · þat men calle treuthe ?  
 Coudestow auȝte wissen vs þe weye · where that wy dwelleth ?'  
 'Nay, so me god helpe !' seide þe gome þanne,  
 'I seygh neuere palmere · with pike ne with scrippe,  
 Axen after hym er · til now in þis place.'  
 'Peter !' quod a plowman · and put forth his hed,

' I knowe hym as kyndely · as clerke doþ his bokes ;  
 Conscience and kynde witte · kenned me to his place,  
 And deden me suren hym sikerly · to serue hym for euere,  
 Bothe to sowe and to sette · þe while I swynke myghte.  
 I haue ben his folwar · al þis fifty wyntre ;  
 Bothe ysowen his sede · and sued his bestes,  
 With-Inne and with-uten · wayted his profyt.  
 I dyke and I delue · I do þat treuthe hoteth ;  
 Some tyme I sowe · and some tyme I thresche,  
 In tailoures crafte and tynkares crafte · what treuthe can deuysel.  
 I weue an I wynde · and do what treuthe hoteth.

For þouȝe I seye it myself · I serue hym to paye ;  
 I haue myn huire of hym wel · and otherwhiles more ;  
 He is þe pretest payer · þat pore men knoweth ;  
 He ne with-halt non hewe his hyre · þat he ne hath it at euen.  
 He is as low as a lombe · and loueliche of speche,  
 And ȝif ȝe wilneth to wite · where þat he dwelleth,  
 I shal wisse ȝow witterly · þe weye to his place.'

[Passus v. ll. 517-523 and 539-562.]

6. *Piers would dismiss Hunger, who refuses to go, and  
 has to be fed (see p. 120).*

' By seynt Poule,' *quod* pieres · ' þise aren profitable wordis !  
 Wende now, hunger, whan þow wolt · þat wel be þow euere !  
 For þis is a louely lessoun · lorde it þe forȝelde !'  
 ' Byhote god,' *quod* hunger, · ' hennes ne wil I wende,  
 Til I haue dyned bi þis day · and ydronke bothe.'

' I haue no peny,' *quod* peres, ' poletes for to bigge,  
 Ne neyther gees ne grys · but two grene cheses,  
 A few cruddes and creem · and an hauer cake,  
 And two loues of benes and bran · ybake for my fauntis.  
 And ȝet I sey, by my soule · I haue no salt bacoun,  
 Ne no kokeney, bi cryst · coloppes for to maken.  
 Ac I haue percil and porettes · and many kole-plantis,  
 And eke a cow and a calf · and a cart-mare  
 To drawe a-felde my donge · þe while þe drought lasteth.  
 And bi þis lyfode we mot lyue · til lammasse tyme ;  
 And bi þat, I hope to hane · heruest in my croft ;  
 And þanne may I diȝte þi dyner · as me dere liketh.'

Alle þe pore peple þo · pesecoddes fetten,  
Benes and baken apples · þei brouȝte in her lappes,  
Chibolles and cheruelles · and ripe chiries manye,  
And *profred* peres þis *present* · to plesse with hunger.

Al hunger eet in hast · and axed after more.  
panne pore folke fro fere · fedde hunger ȝerne  
With grene poret and pesen · to poysoun hunger þei þouȝte.  
By þat it neighed nere heruest · newe corne cam to chepyng; ;  
panne was folke fayne · and fedde hunger with þe best,  
With good ale, as glotoun tauȝte · and gerte hunger go slepe.

[Passus vi. ll. 277-303.]

## C

### OUTLINE OF THE CONTROVERSY.

“WILLIAM LANGLAND is on trial for his life: according to Professor Manly he is already sentenced.” So the case is stated by Dr. R. W. Chambers (Librarian of University College, London), one of the most lucid and interesting of the writers who have contributed to the controversy.

The challenge was first thrown down by Professor Manly in an article published in *Modern Philology* in January, 1906: “I am now prepared, I think, to prove that the three versions are not the work of one and the same man, but each is the work of a separate and distinct author.” Full proof of this dramatic assertion was promised later, but meanwhile the author offered for consideration one single and telling argument. He showed reason for thinking that the confusion as to the Seven Deadly Sins, which is betrayed in Passus V. of the A-Text, was due to two leaves having been lost from the original manuscripts, from which all the extant manuscripts of that text have been copied. Now when the B-Text was made the reviser did not detect that any leaves were missing, but patched up

the faulty passage in a manner which showed that no suspicion of any such gap had crossed his mind. Therefore, Professor Manly argued, the B reviser was not identical with the original author, as, had he been, he would have perceived what was wrong.

Dr. Henry Bradley, in the following April, wrote a letter to the *Athenæum* (April 21, 1906, p. 481), in which, while agreeing with the main contention of Professor Manly as to the defects he had pointed out in the text and the theory of lost leaves, yet offered a different explanation of the loss. "In my opinion the source of all the mischief is to be sought, not in a manuscript written on parchment arranged in quires or gatherings, but in the copy (to use the word in the modern printer's sense) handed by the author to the first transcriber. This would, no doubt, be written on loose leaves of paper." This suggestion left untouched the chief argument of Professor Manly, but gave room for another (conjectural) arrangement of the original text than that put forward by him.

In 1909, two years later, Professor Manly contributed to the *Cambridge History of English Literature* (vol. ii.) an article embodying at greater length his views as to the separate authorship of the three texts A, B, and C. And the case now stood in this way: Certain textual derangements of the A-Text having been accepted by the author of the B-Text, proved that the author of the B-Text could not be identical with the author of the A-Text. And further, in the A-Text two hands may at least be

discovered, one of which is a continuator of the work of the other; while at the very end of the A-Text (in one manuscript only) additional lines are found embodying the name of a third writer, Johan But. The A-Text is then the work of three authors, and the whole *Piers the Plowman* (including B and C-Texts) is of fivefold authorship.

Naturally, Professor Manly did not rely solely upon the missing leaf argument, but upon his conviction that the texts differed in point of metre, grammar, dialect, style, and thought. Unfortunately space did not admit of his giving more than a dogmatic statement of the existence of these discrepancies. There was no room for proof.

The late Dr. Furnivall accepted warmly the case for independent authorship of A, B, and C (agreeing with Dr. Bradley's view of the source of the confusion of the lost leaf), and putting, as usual, English scholars under an obligation by reprinting the various articles in question in pamphlet form up to that date, October, 1908, and subsequently up to 1910.

In *Modern Philology*, January, 1909, M. Jusserand entered the field with an examination of Professor Manly's arguments, accepting the theory of the lost leaf, but refusing Manly's conclusions, and defending warmly the single authorship of William Langland.

In April, 1909 (*Modern Language Review*), Mr. Chambers and Mr. Grattan published an account of their investigation of all the manuscripts of the A-Text, finding the evidence that seemed to follow made for unity rather than independence of author-

ship. They called attention to the fact—frequently forgotten—that fourteen manuscripts of the A-Text of *Piers the Plowman* exist; and that a complete collation of these having never been issued, the exact text of the original A-version cannot be determined until this has been done. Hitherto the ordinary student of the poem had taken for granted that the A-Text, as issued by Professor Skeat, was the first rough draft of the poem, the B-Text a revision of A, and the C a revision of B. But collation of the A-manuscripts produces evidence that the majority of these manuscripts are much nearer in character to the B-Text than has been supposed.

To this valuable article belongs the honour of bringing into prominence the complicated nature of the problem as regards the character of the A-Text.

In *Modern Philology*, July, 1909, Professor Manly replied to M. Jusserand's attack, defending his position with a tenacity equal to that of his opponent.

In January, 1910, the fighting for unity of authorship was strong. In *Modern Philology* M. Jusserand replied to Professor Manly's reply to his original attack, and points out that proofs of multiple authorship, based on changes of mood, etc., in the author, prove too much, and may be found again and again in other authors.<sup>1</sup> He persists in the belief that "William Langland made *Piers Ploughman*."

In the *Modern Language Review* Dr. Chambers

<sup>1</sup> Professor Saintsbury, in his *History of English Prosody*, has a satiric little fling at the matter, from this point of view, in speaking of Tennyson's numerous revisions of his poems (*English Prosody*, vol. iii., p. 195, note).



issued another illuminating article, based on further investigations of manuscripts (attacking Mr. Bradley's position), and tending to strengthen the cause of the party of unity. He once again emphasized the fact that no full conclusion can be come to concerning the problem until a minute examination of *all* the manuscripts (A, B, and C) has been made.<sup>1</sup>

In the next number of *Modern Language Review* (April, 1910), Mr. Bradley gave a further statement of his opinion on the whole question, and owned that on one not unimportant point he had come to a fresh conclusion, owing to the demonstration of Mr. Chambers in the previous January. While holding that the balance of probability is in favour of a plurality of authors, his opinion confirms the view held by the more careful scholars that "little substantial progress can be made in the controversy until the text has been settled by scientific criticism." He draws fresh attention to the important passage—found only in one manuscript (Rawlinson 137), and not included in Professor Skeat's edition—added by John Butt to the twelfth and last Passus of the A-Text. Nothing beyond this single passage is known of John Butt, nor exactly how much of the whole passage in which he mentions himself is due to his hand. Mr. Bradley takes John Butt as an argument against unity of authorship; but Dr.

<sup>1</sup> An edition of A-Text, based upon a collation of all the extant manuscripts, is now being prepared for the Early English Text Society by Messrs. Chambers and Grattan. A great part of it is already in type, and it will probably be issued early in 1914.

Chambers in a further article in *Modern Language Review*, June, 1911, attacks this position, and concludes that the obvious interpretation of John Butt's lines is that "Will" wrote both the A and the B-Texts, and that therefore the words make for unity of authorship. This is the last important addition to the controversy, but meanwhile other interesting matters touching the main issue have been discussed by other scholars, and especially the question of the alliterative metre by Miss Deakin in *Modern Language Review*, July, 1909, who concludes that, as far as versification is concerned, the balance of evidence is for a single author.

Dr. Chambers and Mr. Grattan are at work on the dialect and metre of both the A and the B-Texts, and I understand that they have so far found little or nothing which tells against unity of authorship.

It seems clear, then, that nothing fully conclusive is, or can be, yet arrived at as to the final verdict. William Langland is still on trial, and there is not enough evidence, at present, to prevent us from regarding the poem as written by a single author, who is likely to have been a man named Langland. Who Langland *was* is another and more mysterious matter about which dramatic discoveries may yet be made. But though the controversy has, so far, settled nothing, it has been of great value in calling attention to the difficulties of the problem, and in leading to fuller investigation of the manuscripts of the poem. "It has initiated a new stage in the progress of Langland criticism."

## D

### A NOTE ON BOOKS.

SKEAT'S edition (Clarendon Press) of *Piers the Plowman*, Prologue and Passus I.-VII., contains the whole of the Middle English text translated in the present volume.

Full bibliography of editions, etc., of *Piers the Plowman* may be found in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.

For general information about the matter of the poem, there are, amongst others less valuable, M. Jusserand's *Piers the Plowman* and Ten Brink's *Early English Literature* (vol. i., bk. iii., chap. iv.), both of which give some account of the latter part of the poem.

For a sketch of the literature of the Middle Ages there is an indispensable little book by Professor W. P. Ker—*Mediæval Literature* (Home University Library). Pages 195-201 treat of *Piers the Plowman*.

*The Mediæval Mind* (2 vols., Macmillan), by Henry Osborn Taylor, is valuable and unique on its subject.

Some interesting facts and suggestions concerning

the "social question" in relation to *Piers the Plowman* will be found in the commentary on the poem in A. Burrell's modernized version (Everyman Series), a vivid though somewhat turbulent little book.

THE END







